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Scargill

S.R. 95

Theological School

IN CAMBRIDGE.

The Bequest of

CONVERS FRANCIS, D.D.

C. Francis.
1855.

THE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF A

DISSENTING MINISTER.

By William Pitt Scargill

"Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." Rom. xiv. 22.

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PREFACE

TO

THE FIRST EDITION.

THE following Autobiography, or experience of a Dissenting Minister, is given to the public, not with a view of exciting commiseration for the many annoyances to which such an one is subject, for the writer is perfectly aware that there is no situation in life which is not subject to inconveniences of one kind or another; but the object of the writer is to set forth, in a more popular and homely form than that of abstract argument, the inseparable evils of the voluntary system. The author does not condemn dissent, seeing that he himself is a dissenter, but what he condemns is, the attempt which is now making to

bring all to one level, and to make dissent the rule, instead of the exception. He is perfectly assured, and convinced, that dissent, bad enough as it is, would be yet worse were it not for the existence and operation of the established church; and so far as religious liberty is concerned, there is more of that under the rule and ascendancy of the Protestant establishment, than there would be under the domination of any one sect of dissenters. Were the establishment to be destroyed, there would presently be a struggle amongst the sects for dominion and power; and secular enough as dissent already is, it would become greatly more so, if the vast fabric of the church were demolished. In the ensuing pages, there has been no attempt at exaggeration or high colouring, every thing has been set down calmly, and almost literally; care, however, being always taken to avoid every tendency to personality.

The writer, also, is well satisfied that these brief notices of the experience of one individual contain much that is common to many; others besides himself having undergone precisely the same kind of annoyances,—for much as the

dissenters may boast themselves friends of liberty, they exercise a most troublesome dominion over their pastors. Here, then, they may read their own characters, and may learn not to boast themselves too much of their religious superiority; not to set themselves up as religious dictators to that establishment, by which they have been hitherto tolerated and rendered respectable, in a political view, and not altogether inefficacious in a religious one.

PREFACE

TO

THE THIRD EDITION.

If this little volume had not attracted so much attention, as to compel the publishers to send forth a third edition, I should not have thought it necessary to say a single word concerning the various notices which have appeared both for and against it in the form of criticism. Even indeed as it is, I do not consider that it is at all incumbent on me to answer severally and explicitly each particular notice. How, indeed, could I consider the railing language of the Evangelical and Imperial Magazines? Argument is not applicable, and were I to return railing for railing, I should not be able, if *I were* willing, which I certainly am not, by

any means to equal them. Thus much, however, I will say, that they are indiscreet in thus putting themselves into such a violent passion about the matter; for they thereby show that they feel that there is much more truth in these pages than they profess to give me credit for. They never would be in such a passion for a mere fiction,—nay more than this, the public would not have taken so much notice of the work as to carry off two large impressions, had they not felt that it contained the truth.

There is a disadvantage to the work in its being anonymous: there would be a greater disadvantage to the author if it were not anonymous. This of course is understood by the most virulent of its abusers, so that they stoutly deny its statements, because they know that to bring circumstantial proof would betray the author's name. But though I am of necessity precluded from bringing forward, for corroboration of my assertions, the various particulars of name, date, and place, I am not prevented from directing the attention of my readers to those general principles from which it may be inferred that my particular statements are correct.

One of my reviewers notices my ignorance of the *regime* of the dissenters. The dissenters have no *regime*. Different sects, and different sections of different sects, may have each for themselves *durante bene placito* a something like a system, but there is no real authority, essential coherence, or definite durability in these regulations. It is as notorious as the sun at noonday, that any man from any profession, and at any time, may become a dissenting minister, without leave or licence of any individual or set of individuals, save and except the congregation to which he may preach. Among the Baptists many of the preachers are men in business,—men who have been brought up to business, and who have not perhaps thought of undertaking the ministerial office till they have been some years engaged in commercial occupations. I do not say that many of them may not be men of ability, and abundantly competent to discourse to their people on the general truths and duties of Christianity. I do not say that they may not have acquired some learning, but no one has any authority or power to ascertain the fact. They are admitted to the ministry by their own

flock, thus receiving holy orders from those to whom they give instruction, and who are for the most part men in the same station of life, and of the same general education as themselves. Nor is this mixture of the lay and the clerical character confined to the Baptists; it exists also in other denominations; therefore it is altogether absurd to deny the fact that the ministry among the dissenters may be taken up by any one who chooses it, and that an academical education is not an essential preparative for that office.

Then, again, as to those who are educated for that purpose in the dissenting colleges; is it not also well known that they commence their public ministrations at an unseasonably early age? Did not a youth named Spencer, —a gifted youth no doubt,—preach to crowded audiences when he was but sixteen years of age? In his particular case, and with his superior talents and his decided seriousness, there might perhaps be some excuse; but still it will not do to speak about *regime*, when a youth of sixteen is, under any circumstances, admissible into the pulpit. Spencer I myself have seen and heard. But there is another case

brought to my recollection, for which I am indebted to the report of a friend. I have heard of a youth only fifteen years of age, being sent down from London to a village within a few miles of the metropolis to preach: he was sent by the stage coach, without having made any previous preparation by writing or meditation for that express service, and he described himself to my informant so exceedingly terrified by his situation, that he would willingly have escaped if he could from the coach which conveyed him. He was, however, set down at the door of the chapel, and had no resource but to announce himself as the person sent to preach; he selected a text on the impulse of the moment, and closing his eyes that the sight of the congregation might not embarrass him, he uttered a long, fluent, extemporaneous discourse, highly satisfactory to his audience. But he might just as likely have broken down in the midst, thus marring the devotion of the flock. Yet, whatever regulations may be adopted by any section of any sect, they cannot bear the name of *regime*, since they have no legal sanction, and they are laws only to those who may choose to obey *them.*

In the year 1811, when Lord Sidmouth would have given to dissent something of a coherent form by the sanction and authority of a law in order to prevent those irregularities, which even those who call themselves regular dissenters complained of, immediately the whole body, regular and irregular, united themselves together and clamoured the bill into silence.

The Evangelical and other Magazines speak of dissent as of an uniform and coherent thing; whereas it is the most incoherent and multiform thing that can be imagined to exist under one name; and that name indeed is but a mere negation, rather saying what the thing is not, than what it is. Suppose now, for the sake of argument, it be conceded to the Congregationalists or Independents, that they have regular colleges, with well appointed and competent tutors for the instruction of candidates for the ministry, and that the pupils of these establishments, when called by any congregation to undertake the pastoral office, are, by the united services of several senior ministers, set apart or ordained to the work of the ministry; still, is there any power on earth that can prevent one of these congregations from giving a call to a

minister, who has stepped directly and without any academic intervention from the counter to the pulpit? I do not say that there is no regular gate, but that there are also many other ways of admission; so that, after all, this gate is but as the gate of a park, which has no pailings or fences.

I am accused of under-rating and caricaturing the literature of the dissenting colleges. I have not spoken of them generally, nor as they now exist; but I beg my readers to consider the following facts. In many, if not in all dissenting colleges, admission is not unfrequently conceded to young men of three or four and twenty years of age, who after having closed a common English education at about fourteen years of age, have spent all the remaining interval in an exclusive attention to the pursuits of business. Even granting then, that these students spend four or five years at college, yet they are not unfrequently occupied during the last half of the time in preaching, and of course, in the collection and arrangement of matter for their public discourses; what time, therefore, can they possibly have for any extensive literary attainments? Everybody knows how easy it

is, after a certain fashion, to read any classic author; but everybody knows, also, that there is a style of reading, whereby the knowledge which is acquired on Monday, is nearly, if not altogether, forgotten on Saturday. The facile and rapid communication of classical knowledge which is necessary for the maturer student, is no doubt found convenient for the younger, who, if admitted into the college at sixteen or seventeen, commences preaching at nineteen or twenty.

Again, let it be considered, how slight, if any, are the encouragements in dissenting colleges, to any high degree of literary attainment. There is no fear of being plucked or being refused a degree; there are no medals, fellowships, or profitable tutorships consequent upon taking high degrees, and very often, indeed, the examinations are in presence of those who are themselves not peculiarly competent to the task,—elderly ministers, perhaps, who have forgotten the literature of their youth, or opulent tradesmen who have never been in possession of much learning. Moreover, are not the tutors themselves chosen and appointed by individuals of the same description?—the

trustees, managers, directors, or subscribers, as the case may be? Is it wonderful, then, that the education in these seminaries should be superficial? And is it very surprising, if, under such a system, there should now and then be found a classical tutor not very profound in classical literature, or not very strict in classic discipline? The anecdote which I have related about a Latin quotation given for Greek, seems to have been misunderstood—at least it has been misrepresented. I did not say that the classical tutor mistook it for Greek, but that the individual, when relating the story, said, of course by way of joke, that the classical gentleman mistook it for Greek.

Once more, however, as to the matter of dissenting *regime.* It is well known that the call of a congregation gives the only title to the ministerial character among the dissenters. If any individual, with or without an academic education, should by any introduction obtain access to a vacant pulpit, and should by his preaching and manners gain the good will of the majority of the influential persons of the congregation, he may be forthwith appointed their minister without let or hindrance. More

than once has it happened that a young dissenting minister, at his ordination, when giving his confession of faith, which I believe is not always done, has, after saying that such and such are his present views of the Gospel doctrine, added, that he holds himself open to conviction, and to admit with increasing years and growing information any modification of his present opinions.

Among other matters which I have stated in the following pages, and whereby it seems that in certain quarters I have given offence, is the domineering authority which congregations among the dissenters exercise over their ministers. I have certainly stated the fact, and that by no means in terms too strong; and I have given a few illustrations rather subdued than exaggerated. Cases of the same kind might be selected in great abundance, and if in these circumstances there are fewer collisions between ministers and their flocks than might be expected, I take it that this is owing rather to the habitual compliance of the minister than to any forbearance on the part of the congregation. The minister, at the very first, sets out with an effort to please the congregation, without which

they would not choose him, and he knows that unless he continues to please them, they will soon fall away from him: he is therefore habituated to compliance with their humours. But do I say the dissenting ministers and people are worse than other people on this account? Certainly not. The people of the established church would act in a similar manner if placed in a similar situation. Again, when I sp ak of congregations falling away from a once p pular preacher, and leaving him in reduced rcumstances, I do not deny that the membe of the established church may also have itc' ng ears, and run from preacher to preacher; but they certainly do it not in so great a measure as do the dissenters, nor is their fickleness of taste so injurious to their occasional idols, as is the versatility of those who worship on the voluntary system.

There is also another consideration here to be taken up, which my reviewers have some of them overlooked, and that is, that the fluctuations of popularity are not so manifest in London as in the larger provincial towns; for in London a popular preacher may continue for many years to be followed by great numbers of

hearers, even though they who at first regarded him as an idol, and almost worshipped him, may have gone away after some new man; but in large country towns, where there are few congregations of dissenters, when a minister has lost his first popularity, he cannot find materials to furnish him with a fresh supply of hearers. A dissenting minister, therefore, by a natural sagacity, will be on his guard against offending his congregation. Many dissenting ministers, no doubt, pass their lives pleasantly with their flocks, and are treated with much considerate kindness and attention; and in like manner—but mark I do not say that the cases are altogether parallel,—in like manner, I say, many negro slaves in the West Indies have passed their lives pleasantly in the plantations, even though their masters had the power of the whip.

The Quarterly Review seems to think that I have exaggerated the domination of congregations; but that Review must know that democratic power is not frequently used with remarkable temperance and moderation. And with whatever apparent cordiality ministers and their congregations have seemed to con-

tinue together till death has divided them, yet I have known ministers of high respectability and of decided talent, whose death has clothed their chapels in black, and has filled them with mourning worshippers, who have, in the course of their lives and ministrations, suffered many humiliating and painful mortifications from members of their congregation, thus exercising the grace of patience to the very verge of its power of endurance. There is, I believe, now living, a dissenting minister of high character, of respectable connexions, of considerable opulence, of decided piety, of whom I have heard the following anecdote, viz., that after having finished in the chapel the services of the pulpit, he went into the vestry, previously to administering the Lord's Supper; and while the members of the church were waiting for their minister, one or more of the deacons, or some member of the church followed him into the vestry, and there, for some cause or other, entered into such a violent altercation with him, as brought him to a passion of tears, and so unhinged him as to render him incapable of administering the ordinance. I tell the story as it was told to me; I know nothing

more than that which I have stated above; I once knew the minister himself, before he was connected with the congregation above referred to; and if, as is commonly said in cases of quarrelling, there were faults on both sides, I feel satisfied that by far the less part of the fault was on his side. Such a scene as the above could only have occurred under the voluntary system.

It may be said, if such evils exist under the system of dissent, why is it not more frequently deserted, and why are there not more numerous instances of conformity from the ranks of dissent? They who talk thus, talk lightly and unthinkingly. It is no light and easy matter to shake off at once the habits and intimacies of years, and to leave the friends and kindred who have been growing up with us since we have had a being. It is not pleasant to have to undergo the reproaches of the malignant, and the tears of the affectionate; one cannot at a moment's notice, and on the impulse of an angry feeling, change the whole tenor of one's social habits. When we are under the influence of an irritation we dare not change, and when the irritation abates, the power of habit

regains its ascendancy. Those who have left the dissenters have had their attachments gradually weakened; they have for some time, perhaps even for years, shown symptoms of alienation before they have practically carried their intention into effect, and when they have at last done so, they have been followed by galling reproaches, which, though comparatively harmless to themselves, have the effect of preventing, or at least retarding the secession of others. I have now no more to say concerning these pages or the people who abuse them. I have no inclination to fly into a passion with my pen; and I should never have written this little book, if the dissenters had been satisfied to choose for themselves, and had not endeavoured to make a model of a system which ought rather to be a caution.

THE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

OF

A DISSENTING MINISTER.

CHAPTER I.

Concerning the time and place of my birth I shall not be particular, and indeed I shall in the following narrative studiously omit all mention of such matters as may afford the means of mere personalities. I have a higher object in view than that of gratifying a vain curiosity, for my aim in the following pages will be rather to set forth the evils of a system than to cast reproach upon any individual. Some matters I must disguise, and most I shall rather soften than exaggerate. I am not going to make a fiction that shall look like truth, but rather to exhibit a truth which shall look like a fiction. By many, indeed, it will be treated as fiction; for they who *do not* know it to be true will

think it fiction, and they who *do* know it to be true will call it fiction.

I am the youngest of five, and my father, at the time of my birth, and for many years after, was a linen-draper in the Borough of Southwark. He had been brought up a strict dissenter, and was as pleased to trace his descent from the non-conformists of the days of Charles II. as any Welshman can be to trace his pedigree up to Noah's ark. My mother also was a puritan by descent, and all their friends and acquaintances were more or less of the same class. I was imbued from my earliest childhood with the idea that nothing good could exist out of the pale of dissent. None but the books of our own sect were ever admitted into our house; and as much as possible all care was taken that we should not hold intercourse with the people of the world; for so we designated all who did not belong to our sect. Sometimes, indeed, it was absolutely necessary to meet with individuals belonging to the established church; but on such occasions, I observed, that so little conversation passed, that we seemed to be in the company of foreigners, who could not speak our language. As for going into a church, we should as soon have thought of going into a play-house, which

building we were taught to regard as the house of the Devil; — we did not indeed call the church by the same name, but we regarded it with almost the same abhorrence, and we used to speak of a church parson as of one who had no religion, morals, or even understanding.

Being of a rather ardent temperament, I entered into the spirit of our family religion with no slight degree of zeal, and I regret to say, that the religion of my early youth, which was particularly commended by the pastor of the flock to which my father and mother belonged, consisted for the most part of a very pharisaic contempt for others. I used to make very many severe remarks on the irreligion of the world in general, and of our own more immediate neighbours in particular. I recollect very distinctly the indignation with which, on Sunday, I was in the habit of declaiming against the sin of Sabbath-breaking, when I saw persons setting out in gigs or on horseback on country excursions; and if I read in the newspapers any account of persons being drowned in the river on Sunday, I felt rather more delight in this manifestation of a divine judgment, than rightly became a Christian and a youth. I was invariably attentive to the discourses of our pastor; but I rather think,

upon recollection, that I listened to them so closely, prompted more by the vanity of being afterwards able to repeat the heads of the sermons, than by any truly serious feeling, or any desire after religious instruction.

When I was little more than ten years old, I was sent to a school about six miles from home, the principal recommendation of which school was that the master was a strict dissenter. I had been taught at home to think a little too highly of myself, both as to my acquirements, and my abilities; therefore I thought that I had little else to do at school than merely to walk over the course. My master also contributed not a little to feed my vanity, by a letter which he wrote to my father after I had been at school scarcely five months; for in this letter, which inclosed the bill for my first half-year's schooling, the conductor of the establishment, as he was pleased to call himself, said that in all his experience as a teacher of youth, he had never met with a young gentleman of such decided talents as myself. As we are always pleased with those who agree with us in opinion, and as we think them, in consequence of that agreement, very sensible people, I was of course as well satisfied with my master as he was with me. My father and mother also commended

the penetration, and approved the judgment of my instructor. I afterwards, however, found out, somewhat to my humiliation, that the same commendation which had been lavished on me, had been with equal liberality bestowed on every pupil in the school; but I endeavoured to console myself with the thought, that if it could be true only of one, it might happen that I was that one. I remained at that school for five years, and by means of my extraordinary and decided abilities, I managed to make the following acquirements. In arithmetic I had proceeded as far as Tare-and-Trett; in Latin I had mastered Cæsar and Virgil by the help of Duncan, and some of the odes of Horace by the help of Smart; in Greek I did not shine, perhaps my genius was not fitted for that particular line of study; but my master was kindly and flatteringly pleased to say, that I knew as much as he could teach me; I had learned the greatest part of the Greek Grammar, and I could construe the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John. In addition to all this, I had been taught geography, mapping, drawing, the use of the globes; together with a little chemistry, hydraulics, astronomy, botany, geology, conchology, universal history, and moral philosophy. In a word, I was per-

fectly well qualified to take a place behind my father's counter, for which I was originally destined.

My sectarian zeal had not been at all abated, but rather increased, while I was at school, and my vanity also was cultivated at the same time; for we thought ourselves much better taught than the pupils of the old-fashioned public schools, where nothing was attended to but Greek and Latin, whereas we had the advantage of a scientific education, and knew something of what was passing in the world around us. We did not write Latin verses, but we learned something better, for we learned to ridicule those who did; and when we had demonstrated that Latin verses were of no use in the pulpit, at the bar, in the senate, or behind the counter, we thought that we had completely exploded them, and that all those who paid attention to them in the course of instruction, were less wise than ourselves. The education which I had received gave me a taste for reading; but unfortunately the facility with which I had received it, gave me a distaste for exertion and much labour. On leaving school, I had calculated upon perpetual holiday; but when I was placed behind my father's counter, I found my situation quite the

reverse of a holiday. Every day and every hour my taste became more and more decided in preferring a contemplative to an active life. I was altogether the best educated of the family; — my father knew nothing either of Greek or Latin; my elder brother knew a little of Latin, but not a syllable of Greek; and my three sisters had but a slight acquaintance with French. Feeling therefore my intellectual superiority, I became less and less at ease, in a situation that might be filled by a most uneducated person. Under this impression I grew extremely uneasy in my mind; I was absolutely disgusted with the sordidness of business, and longed most ardently for a liberal profession. Just at this juncture it happened that a new shop in our line was opened in our immediate neighbourhood. This gave my father some great concern, for he was unable to cope with his new rival. For myself, however, it was, as I considered at the time, a fortunate event, for it forwarded my views of adopting a liberal profession.

A friend of mine had lent me to read the Life and Remains of Henry Kirke White, of Nottingham. I perused the book with the utmost avidity, and sympathized most deeply with his dislike of business. I could not help

thinking that there was a remarkable similarity in our respective lots, and I felt that I was destined for something better than the sordid pursuits of trade. The only profession that was open to me was the Christian ministry. This suited at once my own taste and my father's means; for, by the falling off of his business, he had less need of my assistance in the shop, and by the interest of the minister at whose chapel our family attended, he could easily procure my admission into one of those academies, seminaries, or colleges, in which young men of serious habits and presumed talent are gratuitously educated for the Christian ministry among Protestant dissenters.

There are various dissenting colleges in different parts of the kingdom, and they possess a considerable diversity of character, some of them being more learned and classical than others. Some of them pretend to give as complete an education as either of the English Universities; and others, considering that their object is rather to raise up Christian preachers who shall instruct, than to send forth scholars who shall astonish the world, are more intent on theological reading, and on exercising the gifts and graces of pious eloquence, than on leading their students through a course of clas-

sical and mathematical study: not that in these less learned colleges the classics and mathematics are altogether neglected, only they are not pursued so decidedly, and so deeply as in the more learned institutions. It was my lot to be placed in one of the more learned of these colleges, where not only were the students instructed in classical literature, but where it was necessary that all who sought for admission should undergo a previous examination. I think, if I recollect rightly, the standard of admissibility into this college was that the candidate should be able to read Horace, and that he should have made some progress in Greek Grammar. I believe there was no objection to Smart's Horace. This strict classical examination was not always required even in this learned academy, as I afterwards found; for there were sometimes instances of persons at the age of four or five and twenty, who had left school for ten years or more, and who, when at school, had not been very profoundly instructed, yet having felt a strong inclination to adopt the ministerial profession, were admitted into this more learned seminary, under the impression that their advanced age would induce them to apply with the greater diligence to the studies required by their situation.

As it was necessary, however, for young candidates like myself to undergo a previous examination, I was with all due ceremony summoned to attend on a certain day at the house of my pastor, who was to make such inquiry concerning my literary acquirements as might enable him to report me eligible. I must confess that, notwithstanding all the conceit with which I had hitherto regarded my scholarship, I felt in some small degree, to say the least of it, a certain trepidation lest I might fail in the ordeal that I was about to undergo. I knew that it was a rule that, except in peculiar circumstances as above named, it was essential that all admitted into this learned institution should be able to read Horace; of course therefore I took it for granted that I must be examined in Horace, but the question was, whether my examiner would choose to select passages for me to read, or whether I might be permitted to select for myself. I had at school only learned the first book of the Odes and the Art of Poetry, and I trusted that I might be able to make out something of them, if I were required; but I very much feared that all the rest of the book would be almost as untranslatable as so much Chinese, and it was quite impossible for me, even by the help of

the incomparable Smart, to prepare myself for a promiscuous and random examination. Then again, I was in much doubt and fear as to the metres and the prosody; we had not attended at all to those matters when I was at school, for my master knew nothing of versification, except that it was of no use, which he proved very much to the satisfaction of all his pupils: but as I was going to be examined previously to an admission into a learned establishment, I did not know but that some knowledge of the Horatian metres might be required of me. I therefore, a few days before the time appointed for my examination, procured an edition of Horace which contained some account of the metres; but I found to my great dismay that the treatise on the metres was written in a very difficult sort of Latin, which I could by no means make out, nor could I make head or tail of the different systems of verse which were there set down. I closed the book in despair, and I became more and more convinced that my school-master was decidedly right in determining that metres were of no use.

The day for my examination arrived, and I went with a swelling but trembling heart to my pastor's house to drink tea, with Smart's Horace in one pocket, and a Greek grammar in the

other. In my eagerness and haste not to be too late, I was a little before my time, and I was shown into the study, where I found myself with no other company than the books. Curious enough it was, that among the books which were lying on the table, I should find Smart's Horace and Duncan's Virgil. I was delighted to discover this similarity of classical taste between my pastor and myself. The sight of these books was indeed delightful to me — though at the moment I was not aware of the fulness of the relief that they promised me. I afterwards discovered, and I record it here lest I should forget the fact, that this reverend gentleman, who was appointed to be my examiner, was as much afraid of me, as I was of him: he was apprehensive that, if he set me to construe an ode of Horace, and I should be unable to construe it, he should be also as unable to set me right; for he, like many others, as I have since ascertained, possessed the reputation of much greater erudition than had really fallen to his lot. When he came into the study, I took a great deal of pains to look as if I had not been looking upon the table, and I think I succeeded. We went into another room to tea, and after tea the important work of examination commenced. I trembled a little, but not

so much as I should have done, if I had not seen Smart's Horace and Duncan's Virgil on the table in the next room.

I think I can remember the examination almost word for word; therefore, with the reader's leave, I will set it down as it occurred. My pastor was the first to speak, and he began by saying in a very pleasant and gentle voice;—"So, young gentleman, I find that you are desirous of undertaking the office of the ministry, and for this purpose you are a candidate for admission into ——— College. I suppose you are aware that the directors of that institution, being sensible of the great importance of a learned ministry, make a point of requiring all young men who seek to be admitted there, to undergo a previous examination as to their classical attainments."

It was well for me that I had seen Smart's Horace and Duncan's Virgil in the next room, or I should certainly have betrayed symptoms of great agitation. As it was, however, I replied with much self-possession—"I am perfectly aware of it, sir."

In all affairs of this kind, there is nothing like putting a good face on the matter. I was, indeed, astonished at my own boldness; but I found that it answered. My examiner, without

hesitation, replied smilingly,—"In your case, of course, the examination must be a mere matter of form, for considering the high reputation of the school at which you received your education, and the excellent character which you sustained there, no doubt can exist as to your competency, only I must be able to say that I have had proof of your classical knowledge. Now the directors of this college, in order to fix the standard of proficiency high enough, require that a young man, before he is admitted, be able to construe Horace."

I was just on the point of taking Smart's Horace out of my pocket, but my pastor hastily rising up, said, "I will fetch a Horace out of the next room, and perhaps you will be kind enough to do me the favour to construe a line or two."

He was soon back again, bringing with him, not Smart's Horace, but the Delphin Horace, and presenting it to me open at the first ode of the first book, he said—"Read where you please."

I accordingly began, and very boldly proceeded with the first ode, construing it with as much accuracy and elegance as I could. I had not gone very far, when my examiner graciously and kindly interrupted me, saying, "That

will do, sir, perfectly well! admirably well! You not only construe Horace, but you enter into the spirit of your author. I shall have great pleasure in making a favourable report of your scholarship." Then, after a moment's silence, and with a little hesitation, the gentleman proceeded—"Pray, sir, at your school did you learn the metres?"

I felt rather uneasy at this question; but having got through the construing with so much *eclât*, I was emboldened, and fearlessly replied, "Mr. —— did not think metres of much use."

At this reply of mine, I thought at the time, and I have had greater reason to think so since, my examiner felt somewhat relieved, and he replied with great alacrity,—"I am quite of his opinion; and I believe that at the college where you are going, the same opinion is entertained. Some pedantic individuals have occasionally endeavoured to introduce into our seminaries of learning an attention to these trifles; but good sound sense has got the better of the pedants. Indeed, sir, what can we know of the Latin quantity? We know not how the Romans pronounced their prose, and we are much less likely to know how they pronounced their poetry." Thereupon the examiner smiled, and I smiled, and the Delphin Horace was laid

upon the table, and our conversation flew off to other topics, and I found that I had passed my examination most triumphantly, and that the learned college was anticipating a valuable addition to its literary reputation in my learned person.

CHAPTER II.

When I arrived at the college, I was a little disappointed at the look of the place, for instead of finding it a large, imposing classical-like sort of a building, it had a very common-place boarding-school aspect. But it was some consolation to think that my reputation had preceded me, and that I was already considered as a most excellent scholar. This I think was the first time in my life that I had occasion to observe with how small a stock of literature a man may gain a name for scholarship. The establishment, to which I was now introduced, consisted of two tutors and about fourteen or fifteen students. At the head of the establishment presided the divinity tutor, a married man with a family, and as assistant to him in the work of instruction, was a young man not more than three-and-twenty years of age, who bore the title of classical and mathematical

tutor. Each student had an apartment to himself, but the whole family dined at one common table. In fact, the whole establishment was but as one large family.

I soon found, notwithstanding the high literary pretensions of this institution, that classical literature was not so much attended to as theological reading, and that the matter most especially cultivated, was the gift of extemporaneous eloquence. I do not think it necessary to trace my own personal history chronologically and minutely through each separate year of my residence; it will be enough for the purposes of this narrative to give an outline of the general course of study pursued in the college, and a description of the general habits and character of the institution.

The full course of instruction extended through a period of five years, though it frequently happened that students departed before the completion of that period, in consequence of a call to some pastoral office; for during the last two years of our residence we used to preach here and there, as occasion offered: so that if a vacant congregation happened to take a fancy to a young gentleman *in statu pupillari*, he was very easily persuaded to sacrifice the last year of his academic course, for the sake of an im-

mediate introduction to the pastoral office. The routine of instruction was not laid down with any great precision, but as far as I can recollect, it was something to the following effect:—The instruction which we received from our divinity tutor was, for the first year, logic and metaphysics; for the second year, metaphysics and scripture history; for the third year, divinity in general, including controversial theology; and for the fourth and fifth years the same. Several other matters also were attended to by this tutor, such as the composition of themes and sermons, together with elocution. By the above statement, very little information is communicated to the reader; therefore it may be necessary to describe more minutely the manner in which the instruction was conveyed. The divinity tutor instructed us by lectures, and I must acknowledge that the word lecture sounded to my ears so much more manly than the word lesson, that it had an indescribable charm for me at my first entrance into the college; and when I came to ascertain what a lecture really was, it became much more charming, for it required on my part no trouble at all. I should be sorry to make myself disagreeable to my readers, by interrupting the course of my narrative with remarks; but really, I cannot

help pausing here for the purpose of making an observation on the subject of lectures, which of late years have been mightily prevalent and popular. It seems to me that lecturers and the lectured have a kind of impression that the mind bears some resemblance to a cup into which any thing may be poured, and so they talk of capacity, and of fulness of mind, of emptiness of mind, and so on; and they regard knowledge as a kind of liquid which may be poured into the mind, and the lectured seem to think that they may be passive recipients of knowledge from the lecturers. I do not know, and will not take upon me to say, how far this notion may be correct, as it concerns the generality of mankind; I know only this, that if my mind bears any resemblance to a cup, it certainly must have been turned bottom upwards when my theological tutor poured out the wisdom of his instructions, for I retained very little, if any thing at all of the matter.

This was the mode of his lecturing:—from a book of his own writing, or of some one else's, for I could merely see that it was a written book, he read to us, as we sat at a table with writing materials about us, a certain quantity of matter concerning logic, metaphysics, or divinity, as the case might be; and we, listening

with much apparent reverence and attention to the lecturer, endeavoured, according to the best of our ability or inclination, to take down what was said, in order that we might afterwards profit thereby. But, alas! such was the frailty of our nature, and the digressiveness of our minds, that we retained either in our minds or in our note-books but little of the instruction thus communicated to us. I used to think that it would have been better for us at once to have had the MS. given to us, so that we might have transcribed it fairly and deliberately—but then that would not have been lecturing.

It may, however, be asked, whether there were not some subsequent examination whereby our progress might be ascertained. In answer to this very natural inquiry, I can only say that there certainly was an annual examination; but I am very sure that it was impossible for any one by means of that examination to ascertain our progress in those subjects in which we were examined. I desire to have it understood that I am now speaking of matters which took place many years ago, and therefore there may have been in recent times some alteration in the mode of examination at this learned college. But in those days this was the form and mode of the examination. Previously to the long

summer vacation we began our preparations. Let it be supposed that a class consisted of four persons; the divinity tutor would give to each of them in turn a question relative to the matters in which they had been lectured; these questions were written down by the students, and they endeavoured as well as they could, from the notes which they had taken of the lectures, to find the answers to the questions; but if the notes happened unfortunately to be deficient just where they were most wanted, then the tutor would supply the deficiency from his own book, in which all the questions and answers were written down at length; or if the language of the reply, which the student might furnish from his own resources, should not be exactly the same with that in the tutor's lecture book, then would he kindly set the student right, and make the two answers coincide word for word, in order to prevent mistakes at the time of examination. If then the number of questions should amount to a hundred and twenty, it was not expected or even demanded of each student to answer all the questions, but each student took the question only which came to his turn; and if the whole set were divided into four equal parts, then of a class of four, each individual would have only thirty answers

to learn by heart, and these thirty answers were learned during the long summer vacation. The examination, which was immediately after the long vacation, took place in the presence of the directors or trustees, and no one else; and the tutors themselves were the examiners, and the examination on the part of the divinity tutor consisted in his hearing us say by rote those cut-and-dried answers which had been prepared for us previous to the vacation. The trustees, being elderly and quiet gentlemen, bore the examination with most exemplary patience, and very wisely abstained from asking us any questions, for fear perhaps of putting us out. I cannot but confess that, when I found what was the system of instruction and the mode of examination, I began to wonder what must be the line of tuition pursued in the less learned seminaries. I will not affirm that the lectures given might not have been very good, and all the matters therein stated very true; yet there was no effectual provision made to bring us to a right understanding of them, and in our examination, provided our memories were equally good, it was impossible for any one to ascertain which of us understood the topics and which did not.

Our classical and mathematical studies were

not a whit superior to our metaphysical and theological. Whence our college gained its reputation for classical pre-eminence I know not and cannot conjecture. It is very true that we talked about and pretended to read the higher authors; but we read them in such a fashion, that it would have been next to a miracle if we could have recollected on Saturday what we learned on Wednesday. We read Sophocles, we read Plato, we read Longinus, we read Aristotle, but we knew no more of these authors after we had read them than we did before; for we merely made an attempt to construe the text by the help of the Latin version at the bottom of the page. I also found Smart's Horace and Duncan's Virgil quite as great favourites at this seat of learning as they had been at the classical and commercial seminary where I had received the earlier part of my education. Prosody also was by no means popular at this institution. The Greek metres were never once named; for surely if it were a waste of time to study the Latin metres, it must have been a still greater waste to study the Greek. I have since ascertained, what I then suspected, that the managers of the institution, by way of economizing their resources, hired the cheapest classical tutors that they

could get; for they knew that there was an English translation of every Latin author, and a Latin version of every Greek book, and they took it for granted that some way or other the English of both might be acquired; and in truth the whole of our classical discipline was doing the text into English. I have in the course of my life frequently regretted the slovenly manner in which, at that seat of learning, we pretended to read the classics; but at the time I was highly gratified to find how soon and how easily I could read Sophocles, Plato, and Longinus. Indeed, I believe that tutors, students, and all connected with the college, saw no other use in classical studies than merely coming at the English of the Greek and Latin; and this mistake, egregious though it be, seems spreading far and wide, and is by no means limited to dissenting institutions.

In our mathematical studies, we did not make quite so much apparent progress as in our classical. We did a little geometry, and a little algebra, and once or twice we measured a meadow at the back of the house. The mathematical lecture was never a very long one, nor was it one of frequent occurrence,—it was not in very high favour either with tutor or students. The world, or some people in the

world, have blamed the University of Cambridge for the great attention which it pays to mathematical studies. Perhaps the managers of the seat of learning of which I am now writing, thought that they could not do better than set their faces directly against the Cambridge system, and pursue one quite the reverse of it. Indeed, during the latter years of our residence in the college, we had little time for mathematical or any other studies, seeing that we were then much engaged in preaching. It has been objected to the English Universities, that though they profess to educate young men for the Christian ministry, they give no direct instruction in the art of preaching, so that it may be said of them that they teach men to be preachers, without teaching them to preach. I should certainly have thought that there was some force in this objection, had I not been in an institution in which young men are taught to preach. But not only are they in such institutions taught to preach, they are also taught to pray; and I must freely confess that this kind of training is but little calculated to fill the mind with reverential feelings. The dissenters having no form of prayer for public worship, every minister supplies, from his own resources, prayers, and sermon too, and these

are most admired when delivered extemporaneously. The sermons are not always delivered without notes; but I believe in no case whatever are the prayers written, or if they be written they must be learned by heart, for the sight of a minister reading a prayer in a dissenting meeting-house or chapel, would be considered a downright abomination—such a thing is never seen except among the Socinians, and with them I believe it is not universal. Extemporaneous prayer used to be considered, and by some persons still is, as the result of a momentary inspiration; but with the generality of those who use it, it is most likely the result of habit, of knack,—even as any other kind of off-hand dexterity in the use of words. If, then, extemporaneous praying and extemporaneous preaching be a desirable qualification, and if it be only to be acquired by habit and practice, the habit must be formed at an early period. Early enough is the attempt made in dissenting colleges;—I could, were I so disposed, enumerate many ludicrous anecdotes of ridiculous blunders made by young beginners in the art of extempore prayer; but I shall not enter into particulars, for there may be some persons now living, who may not be pleased to be reminded of the follies of their

youth;—I say follies, not sins; for whatever sin there might be in the matter, lay rather at the door of those elderly persons who permitted and prompted young persons thus to commit themselves. In the college now referred to, it was a standing rule, that each student in rotation, after the completion of the first year of his academic course, should conduct the family devotion in the evening. It was not expressly stated that the prayer should be extemporaneous, but it was generally understood so, and I never remember to have witnessed any deviation from that practice. It is indeed true, that some few, not daring to trust themselves to the impulse of the moment, and to the words which might present themselves on the occasion, did previously compose a prayer, which they committed to memory; but I feel very confident that, had any student read this composed prayer from the paper on which it was written, he would have met with reproof from the theological president. Now when it is considered that students were admissible into this institution at the early age of sixteen, and that individuals of various measures of talent were, of course, all expected to perform the same kind of duty, it may very naturally be supposed that by some it would be but awkwardly done. I

remember even now, with a painful and mortifying distinctness, several scenes in which devotion has been converted into diversion. Frequently would some trembling novice, forgetting what he had learned by heart, abruptly pause in the midst of his prayer, painfully exerting his recollection to gather up the broken thread; and frequently would some inexperienced youth, trusting to his power of extemporizing, fluently commence with a bold and steady effusion of devotional common-places, and then suddenly would he become confused, forgetting what he had said, and perhaps repeating it; or, becoming more bewildered, would ramble into all manner of incoherences, and talk such nonsense as no waking man would think of under other circumstances. To young men whose risible faculties are not under due subjection, such scenes are highly provocative of laughter, and I well remember the difficulty with which many suppressed the actual explosion of loud laughter, while almost every side was shaking. Surely the acquisition of the knack of extemporaneous prayer, must be a matter of immense value, when such means are used to gain it. Much has been said of late concerning the irreverence with which prayers are attended to in the English

Universities, but nothing can equal the indecorum of exposing prayer itself to the risk of becoming the means of merriment. Besides, if an extemporaneous devotional fluency be the result of inspiration, what prevents that inspiration from being as perfect in the case of youth and inexperience, as it is in more advanced life? But the truth is, that almost all parties know that the matter depends upon intellect and habit.

From the statement which I have given of the studies pursued at this college, it may be naturally supposed that our time was very much at our own disposal. We received but two lectures a-day; one from the theological, and one from the classical tutor; the preparation for the theological lecture took no time, and that for the classical but little. The lectures were all over with the classes by one o'clock, and the time of their commencement was nine or thereabouts. The employment of our time was of course at our discretion; those who had wisdom to make a good use of it, did so accordingly; for those who were disposed to act otherwise there was neither check nor restraint. There was no discipline, nor indeed much need of it; the institution was as one large family, and the only punishment was expulsion; and

if a young man was expelled from one dissenting college, he would be considered very unfortunate if he did not gain admittance into another. As there was no punishment for the unruly, so there were no rewards for the diligent. Those who were truly studious acted from the impulse of their own taste, or from a calculation of remote benefit.

During the last two years of our residence in the college, we practised preaching, either at our college chapel, or in the villages round about us; and as students were admissible at the age of sixteen, several became preachers before they were twenty years of age. Of course our sermons could only be the result of our various theological reading; there could be nothing of the fruit of meditation or of the knowledge of human nature, for the very confined sphere in which we lived presented humanity to us under only one aspect. Yet I very well remember that by virtue of some of our metaphysical speculations, we thought ourselves great adepts in the science of human nature. This, however, was a matter of comparatively little moment, for we had in the writings of the old nonconformist divines a fund of moral and religious truth, from which we could copiously draw. We used to think it an

abomination, almost next to a sin, for any one to preach a sermon not of his own composing; indeed, so chary were we of originality, that we could scarcely tolerate a long quotation except with special acknowledgment. Some of our earlier sermons were very learned, critical, and metaphysical after a fashion; I question whether at fifty we shall be able to understand the metaphysics that we wrote at nineteen or twenty. I have very little acquaintance with preachers of the established church, either young or old, though I have read many of their printed sermons, ancient and modern; but there has always appeared to me to be a marked difference between the style of a dissenting preacher, and that of a clergyman of the establishment; and the difference seems to consist principally in this,—that the style of the clergyman is admonitory, founded on established principles; but the style of the dissenter is argumentative, attempting to establish certain principles; the one exhorts, the other proves; and this argumentative style is most prominent in the earlier pulpit compositions.

In the academic establishment which I have been describing above, the utmost liberality of political opinion prevailed, and frequently political topics were given to us as the subject of

our themes, and I believe it was generally considered a piece of academic etiquette to take the anti-national side of a question. There were several shades and gradations of opinion, from the sober whig down to the conceited and roaring democrat. Paine's Age of Reason was of course not in great esteem among us, but his Rights of Man were highly popular; nor did we much relish the Socinianism of Dr. Priestley, but we admired him as a martyr to the cause of liberty; and though we adopted not the Arianism of Dr. Price, we gloried in his avowal of the right of the people to call kings to account, and to cashier them for misconduct. We regarded America as the *ne plus ultra* of political perfection,—as the pure land of liberty, civil and religious. We hated the name of William Pitt, and all but worshipped that of Charles James Fox. We could not very well understand Tooke's Diversions of Purley, but we venerated his politics. We had in our college library, in four volumes, the trial of Thelwall, Hardy, Horne Took, and others for high treason; and we regarded Sir Francis Burdett as one of the first of living characters. Indeed, whatever theological or political prejudices I had been imbued with under my paternal roof, these were by no means abated or diminished

by the society or pursuits of the college; but though they were not immediately and palpably diminished, yet I think that ultimately, by means of the excess to which the opinions were carried, and the bigotry with which they were maintained, the hold which they originally had of my mind was very greatly shaken. This effect did not appear at once, but was was developed several years after, much to my annoyance. I believe that one of the reasons why we never read Aristophanes was, that he makes democracy look so exquisitely ridiculous. The difficulty of the author could be no objection, for to our classical tutor one author was quite as easy as another, if it had but a Latin version at the bottom of the page; and we used to be very proud of reading Æschylus, Thucydides, and Longinus. The fact is, that the eminence of our classical tutor's scholarship was so great, that he could read any Greek author with a Latin version, and none without it.

It may be supposed that after having given a view of the more grave and serious characteristics and pursuits of the institution in question, I should say a few words respecting the manners, habits, and amusements of the pupils. On this subject, however, there is very little that can be said, and I have alluded to the topic

merely, or principally, for the purpose of saying that we were for the most part a very grave and solemn set of beings. The chess-board, the flute, and the draft-board were our chief recreations, very sparingly used, and not one of us ever attained to great perfection in any one of the three. From the long acquaintance that I have had with the dissenters, I am led to think that mediocrity is their chief characteristic. They have had, and may yet have among them, men who aspire to literary eminence, and some few who may be called men of genius; but their literature is narrow, and their genius is not of the highest order. They live so much among themselves, and they have such a dwarfish and stunted standard of excellence, that they never astonish anybody but themselves. The only matter in which they are at all excessive, is in radicalism; they are really outrageous in what they are pleased to call a love of liberty. I speak not of all, but of part, and a very great part.

I shall close this chapter by some remarks in vindication of the freedom with which I have spoken of an institution, in which I have represented myself as having received a gratuitous education; for some persons may say that I am very ungrateful thus to speak of that

which was altogether a gift, and which I ought to have received with all thankfulness. Yes, indeed, if they, from whom I received this education immediately, had been the actual donors of the boon, instead of blaming them for what they did not, I ought to thank them for what they did; but the fact is not so: they were not the donors, but they were persons employed by the trustees of the donors, and it was a duty incumbent on the trustees to find competent instructors, and it was the duty of the instructors to give all diligence, according to the best of their ability, to fulfil the purpose for which they were appointed. But the evil of these small and independent institutions is, that there can be no competent means of ascertaining the fitness, or of overlooking the fidelity of tutors. I do not indeed wonder, considering all that I have seen and heard of dissenting places of academic instruction, that the dissenters themselves feel an anxiety after admission into the universities, yet I do not see how that will much mend the matter, unless there be also conceded to them an eligibility to all places of honour and profit which belong to the several colleges; for these prizes stimulate the diligence of the young men. Nor indeed, do I think that those persons who are hearty dis-

senters, would choose to run the risk of sending their sons to these ecclesiastical establishments. The fact is, that the dissenters, in urging forward this question, have no very distinct apprehension of remote consequences; but they have two unpleasant feelings which they wish to get rid of. One of these feelings is, the consciousness that their own ministers, though not absolutely ignorant and uneducated, are yet very superficial in their learning, and very shallow in their general acquirements; and the other feeling is, that they are marked, and so far degraded, by the exclusion from academic honours. Yet, I must say, that if they were admitted to the honours, and excluded from the profits of the universities, they would feel the degradation much more, and would make a much louder cry about the grievance. If I may be permitted to use a somewhat ludicrous comparison, I would say, that the dissenters being barefooted, are crying for shoes, which shoes, when they get them, will pinch their feet, and then they will cry more loudly and more importunately than ever—not to get rid of the shoes, but to have them cut, stretched, and distorted for their own ease and accommodation; and then the shoes will be spoilt.

CHAPTER III.

After I had finished my studies at the college, I went to seek my fortune in the dissenting world, for at that time dissenterism was all the world to me,—I knew not of, and cared not for, any other world: the national religion and its temples were to me exactly on a par with the mythology of Greece and Rome, and the temples in which wood and stone were wont to be worshipped. I do not know anything which can come up to the conceit of an imperfectly educated and simple young man. I was full of vanity and self-sufficiency; I felt myself to be an oracle, and fancied that I should astonish and illuminate the world. Perhaps, however, conceit is common to the young of all classes, educated or not educated. Thirty years ago, I should not have thought it necessary, as I do now, to explain to my readers the manner in which ministers gain possession of their pulpits in dissenting congregations: but I find that our internal polity is not so well known to all the

world as I then imagined. There are many classes of dissenters, but to which particular body I belong I do not wish to make known, for the matters on which I shall treat are nearly common to them all.

It is a matter of boasting among the dissenters, that they are not compelled to receive their ministers from the appointment of others, but that they choose for themselves. This they certainly do, and so much the worse for them and their pastors, as will perhaps frequently appear in the course of my history. There are varieties in the mode of election; for in some chapels the right of choosing the minister rests in the trustees, in others the choice rests in the whole body of the subscribers, and in others the minister is chosen by the church only. In many dissenting chapels a distinction is made between the church and congregation; the congregation consisting of the whole body of the worshippers, while the church includes only the communicants, who are not admitted but by the consent, and with the approval of the members,—so that, in fact, a dissenting church is a kind of close spiritual corporation.—The mode of admission into the church, I may as well state and explain in this place. Any individual, who is so inclined,

may become an attendant on the worship of a dissenting chapel, and may also become a subscriber; but in many chapels it is not allowed to any one who pleases to partake of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. This is only to be done by admittance into the church, which takes place thus: —When an individual, under serious impressions, wishes to become a regular communicant, and a member of the church, he must make known his wishes to the minister, and one or two of the deacons. By these persons he will be examined as to his religious attainments, views, and principles, and he will be also required to give a written account of his religious feelings and experience. On some evening in the week preceding the Sunday on which the Lord's Supper is to be administered, there is held in the chapel what is called a church-meeting; and on this occasion the candidate for admission to church-membership attends in the vestry, where he is shut up alone, while the proceedings take place in the chapel touching his admissibility. The minister states that a person is desirous of being admitted a member of the church, mentioning the name of the party, and such other particulars as may be necessary. He then describes the conversation which has passed between himself

and the candidate for admission, and then he reads aloud the written experience which has been drawn up, and he calls upon those deacons who have had any conversation with the party to declare what has been the result of their interview; and when they have spoken to the competency of the candidate, the question is put to the vote, and for the most part, it is carried unanimously that the individual shall be admitted to church-membership. He is then called out of the vestry into the chapel, and the minister announces to him that by the unanimous vote of the church, he is admitted a member; then the right hand of fellowship is given to him by the minister and the deacons, and he becomes a member accordingly.

Before I undertook the work of the ministry, I had been present at some meetings of this kind, and I well remember one particular instance, which produced on my mind a very unpleasant impression at the time, and which I have often thought of since as illustrative of the admixture of very improper and selfish feelings with matters of great religious solemnity. The candidate for admission, on the occasion to which I refer, was a young lady about eighteen years of age; the minister of the chapel was a most amiable man, and much more of a

gentleman than dissenting ministers usually are; the two deacons who had visited the young lady to converse with her on religious subjects, were respectable and substantial shopkeepers in the city; the one I believe was a grocer, and the other a tallow-chandler; the tallow-chandler was the older man of the two, and a very active man as related to all matters connected with the chapel; indeed I may say that he was almost the ruler and chief manager of the place. It so happened that the younger deacon of the two had been long acquainted with the young lady's family; but when I say younger, I am speaking comparatively, for he was quite old enough to be her father. Now when these two called to speak to the candidate on religious topics, the one who had been familiar with the family received of course a much larger share of the young lady's spiritual confidence than the other. The tallow-chandler took this in very high dudgeon, and therefore, when called upon by the minister to declare to the church the result of his colloquy, he rose in evident chagrin, and said in a tone of nasal sneer, which I shall never forget as long as I live, "I have no doubts whatever but what Miss —— is a very proper person to be admitted a member of this church, but I cannot

speak much from my own knowledge, for when I called upon her with brother ——, I had but little conversation with her; my brother ——, however, was closeted with her for some time, and he may perhaps give the church more particular information." This was very many years ago, yet I remember it as well as if it were but yesterday; nor shall I ever forget the repulsive shudder, with which I heard this manifestation of worldly business mingling with what ought to have been considered as one of the most solemn acts of religion.

I make no apology for the above anecdotical digression, because I may have occasion to make many more of the same kind, and they may tend very strongly to illustrate my topic.

To proceed: the first and chief object which I had in view after leaving college was to obtain a pulpit, and this was not a very easy matter. I have already shown that I had not to wait for any authority to be allowed to preach; I was perfectly at liberty to enter any dissenting pulpit, provided I had leave from its occupant or owners. As I had composed some half dozen elaborate discourses, full, as I thought, of originality of idea and elegance of expression, I had no objection to take every opportunity of preaching them whenever I could, hoping

that I might thereby advertise myself as an eloquent preacher. I was particularly gratified when I received, as I not unfrequently did, express compliments for my "very excellent sermon." My own immediate friends and acquaintance, judging from these specimens, thought that I was destined to make a figure in the world, and to become a popular preacher. I remember well the spiritual conceit with which I regarded dissenting ministers in comparison with the clergy of the established church; for I thought that the clergy were merely intent upon temporalities and worldly considerations, forgetting that a craving after popularity and a fishing for compliments savoured also very strongly of the world. I trust, however, that there was not merely and solely the motive of worldly vanity, but that there was also some serious consideration of Christian duty moving me and occupying my thoughts in my earlier ministrations; still I must confess, upon reflection, that there was too decided a predominance of the love of popularity. The fact is, that the preacher whose chapel my parents attended, and from whom I received my first religious impressions, and my earliest promptings to undertake the ministerial office, was a man of very popular

talents: hearers came to him from all directions, and from very considerable distances; and whenever he was engaged, as was often the case, to preach charity sermons, sometimes in one place, and sometimes in another, he was sure to fill the chapel, attracting hearers, who would, if I may so speak, go through fire and water to hear him. No wonder, therefore, that with my first notions of preaching were connected ideas of popularity. Moreover, when it is considered at how early an age we frequently began to preach, and how eager young men are in rivalling each other, it may easily be imagined that personal feelings and a love of applause would strongly intermingle with better thoughts.

I have said that dissenting congregations choose their own ministers, but it must not be supposed that he who is most acceptable to the largest number of hearers is always the successful candidate; for a great deal depends on the influence of the leading people, who govern not by any express law, but by the mere force of circumstances, and the power of wealth. The real government of a dissenting congregation is in an aristocracy of wealth,—I cannot say much of rank, for to the best of my knowledge, there are no peers among them: here

and there if there should happen to be a knight or baronet belonging to a dissenting congregation, a very particular and especial homage is paid to him, by those who in general despise rank. The first attempt that I made to obtain a pulpit for myself, was with a small congregation in the vicinity of the metropolis. I was personally acquainted with the then minister, who was about to leave them, and I expressed to him my wish to have an opportunity of introducing myself to them. He very kindly offered me the use of his pulpit, but at the same time said to me, "I can be of no service to you, for my recommendation would be rather an injury to you than an assistance." This friend of mine was leaving his congregation under somewhat unpleasant circumstances. He had been at first highly popular among his people, and greatly esteemed by them; he was altogether a kind of idol to them; but he had married a lady who was not quite acceptable to the ladies of the congregation, and after his marriage he spent much less of his time in visiting his flock and gossipping with them, than he had formerly done; for he found his home very attractive compared with what it used to be when he was a single man and lived in lodgings. These were, of course, in the

house of one of his congregation; his change of residence, therefore, and going to housekeeping was one cause of affront. Then again, in order to meet the increased expenditure of an establishment, he was under the necessity of taking pupils; and as he had, by leading for some few years a gossipping sort of life, pretty nearly forgotten all that he had learned at school and college, he found it necessary to devote more time to his studies, and this rendered him far less entertaining to his flock than he had formerly been; so they began to complain that he neglected his duties, and that he regarded his spiritual charge merely as a matter of secondary consideration. The salary which they gave him was but ninety pounds a-year, and for that they expected the whole of his time, thoughts and attention. I think that they were unreasonable. Nevertheless, at the time of which I am now writing, I thought little of the circumstances under which my friend was leaving his flock; I thought only that I should be very glad to succeed him, and to become pastor of a congregation.

Taking with me three of my best sermons, —for my friend preached three times every Sunday for ninety pounds a year,—I went full of hope and confidence to please the listening ear.

When my friend told me that he could be of no service to me, I heard him with the utmost indifference, for I did not suppose that I needed any other recommendation than my own talents, set off by my own elocution. The congregation, since the minister's marriage, had rather fallen off, and had become languid in its attendance; but hearing that a stranger had engaged to preach, they came more numerously; for though I was not going to preach before them expressly as a candidate, yet it was pretty well understood that I had a view to the vacant pulpit. I was heard with profound attention, and was exceedingly successful in my extemporaneous devotions, which I poured forth with a fluency almost astonishing to myself. I could evidently see, while I was delivering my sermon, that the congregation was mightily pleased with me; for I observed that at several of my pretty metaphors and similes they exchanged glances of approbation one with another; and at one time when I was very pathetic, I observed an old lady put her handkerchief to her eyes.

After the morning service was over, and when I went into the vestry, there came to me several of the congregation, who were one and all pleased to express themselves highly gratified with my performance: they spoke

very handsomely of me indeed, and I must say that I could not help thinking within myself, that there really was some truth in what they said. Among the rest was the old lady who had put her handkerchief to her eyes when I was pathetic. I found that this lady was the principal person in the society, and that without her consent nothing was done by the congregation. I received an invitation to dine at her house, and now I thought, of course, that my fortune was made, and I was fully resolved to put on my best manners and to talk my utmost wisdom. I took care to behave at table with the utmost propriety, and found or made some opportunity of introducing in conversation most of the pretty or profound thoughts that had sprung up in my mind for the last twelve months. This lady had two daughters, who were between thirty and forty years of age. They had been very pretty, I dare say, when they were young, and at the time that I saw them they were exceedingly clever, and highly genteel. I thought them, indeed, rather proud, and as my manners were not very genteel, I did not feel quite at ease; and all the efforts that I made to give myself the air of a gentleman only embarrassed me the more. In college I had frequently been told that our educa-

tion made us gentlemen; but I found, when I came into the world, that it made us very awkward ones.

In the afternoon I preached again, and was again eloquent and impressive; the congregation was larger in the afternoon than it had been in the morning. I began to think that my fame was spreading. I was invited by another of the congregation to tea. In this second visit I was more at ease; my entertainer was a man of business, very well off in the world, but not much of a gentleman. I found him rather a facetious man than otherwise. He talked to me freely about the vacancy that was likely to take place in the pulpit, and hinted pretty strongly that I was a probable person to fill it. He told me that the salary was but small at present, owing to a variety of circumstances; but that he had no doubt that a man of my abilities might soon increase the congregation, and make a very pretty thing of it. He alluded to the old lady at whose house I had dined. He asked my opinion of the young ladies; and when I said that I thought they had been once very pretty, he laughingly told me that I must not imagine that they were not young now; that they regarded themselves as wits and beauties: he even went so far as to tell me,

that if I should be chosen minister of the chapel, it would be a good speculation for me to marry one of them. He also said it was the general opinion that the minister who was about to leave might have married one if he would, and that if he had, he would in all probability have retained his situation. In a word, I felt myself quite at home with this communicative and talkative gentleman, and after the evening service, I went back to his house to supper, where I met several others of the congregation, who seemed to admire me as much as I admired myself. They were unanimous in commending my gifts and graces, and they one and all declared that I should be the very man to suit them—provided that Mrs. —— was agreeable; but nothing could be done without her consent; for she was a most valuable prop to the interest, inasmuch as she subscribed not less than ten guineas a-year, which could be very ill spared from their funds, and whenever anything was proposed contrary to her opinions or her wishes, she always threatened to withdraw her subscription, and that threat always brought the party to reason. Alas, for my hopes of this chapel! Mrs. —— was not agreeable, or in other words I was not agreeable to her or to her daughters. I was curious to ascertain wherein

I had offended, or wherein I failed, and it was not long before my curiosity was satisfied. Mrs. ——, I found, objected to me because I was too talkative, and the young ladies declared that I was a great gawky. I never was so mortified in my life; I was humbled down to the dust, and was grieved beyond measure that I had thrown away so much wisdom, and so much eloquence all to no purpose. There was no such thing as appealing against the judgment that was passed. I knew that the majority of the congregation, had they been left to their unbiassed opinion, would have chosen me to be their pastor; but they did not dare to exercise, and scarcely dared to express their opinion. Among us dissenters there is often a good deal of quizzing and laughing about Queen Elizabeth being the head of the church, and we think that our banter on this topic is totally unanswerable by the united wisdom of the whole bench of bishops; but here, in the instance of this little suburban dissenting chapel, is a specimen of a female head of a church exercising a most despotic and unbounded sway: her will is law in everything, because she subscribes ten guineas a-year. Really, I cannot understand how it is that dissenters, who make so much ado about religious

liberty, should suffer themselves to be so domineered over, and so trampled upon by their fellow-dissenters. Perhaps they think that where the slavery is voluntary on their own part the disgrace is less, but for my part I think that the disgrace is greater.

I had now been six months away from my college, and had not yet had a call to any vacant congregation, and I began to think that I had been very unfortunate, and that unless I should soon succeed I should lose my reputation; for when a minister has been long unsettled, though desirous of obtaining a settlement, there is a presumption and prejudice against him, that there is something objectionable about him. Just at this time there happened to be a vacancy in a chapel in the city, of some reputation and importance, the salary of which amounted to three or four hundred a-year. There were of course many candidates both from town and country for so important a station as this: and there was a great deal of scheming and contrivance among the various factions in the congregation, each to gain their own point. There was not in this chapel, as in that smaller one in the suburbs, any one individual manifestly domineering over the whole society; but there was

on the other hand a variety of factions all ready for explosion, and endeavouring to outreach each other; and there was also, as there will be always found in every dissenting congregation, the distinction between the aristocratic and the democratic party. In the present vacancy, however, there was thus much of unanimity, that they thought it best not to be in too great a hurry to fix on a new pastor, lest they might make more haste than good speed. It devolved on a committee to provide supplies for the pulpit, and as the chapel at this time stood much in need of painting and white-washing, and some more substantial repairs, it was thought that if the service could be performed by supplies only, for twelve months or more, at a certain sum per Sunday, enough might be saved out of the annual income, for painting, &c.

But they could not occupy twelve months in hearing candidates, therefore it was thought best to find some one who would act as a regular supply for a given time. One of the committee happened to be a wholesale linen-draper with whom my father did business, and by the interest of this gentleman I obtained the engagement to supply the chapel for twelve months, at the rate of two guineas a-week. I

felt extremely honoured at being even permitted to preach before so respectable and numerous an audience; but lest I should be exalted above measure, my friend, the wholesale linen-draper, gave me expressly to understand that I must not flatter myself with any idea that there was any possibility of my being chosen to the vacant pulpit. I replied to him that I was obliged by the intimation, and that I should not presume to entertain any such ambitious thought. He was kindly pleased to say that the objection to me had no reference whatever to want of talent on my part, but it was solely on account of my youth and inexperience; for that a station of that importance demanded a person of years and experience in the world. In a word, I was led to infer that I was much too inexperienced for such an enlightened congregation, and I believe the real truth was, that the humility of my origin was rather against me. Had my father been a wholesale linen-draper on the north side, instead of a retail linen-draper on the south side of the river Thames, I should have stood a better chance, or even had I myself been a something of a dandy, and worn spectacles and high shirt-collars, I should have been considered not quite so absolutely ineligible. But I was always

somewhat sheepish in my manners, and very plain in my dress.

I had been in the habit of hearing so much about the superior wisdom and penetration of this congregation, that when I preached to them for the first time, I stood trembling in the pulpit, surprised and abashed at my own presumption, and feeling that they were far more qualified to instruct me than I was to teach them. I seemed to think that the pew openers and the clerk must look upon me with contempt. I managed, however, to get through the service pretty well, and my friend the wholesale linen-draper, kindly condescended to come into the vestry after service was over, and to tell me that I had acquitted myself very well: and upon the whole, he said, he had been better pleased than he had expected to be. I was proud of such a compliment, and truly grateful for it; and I really began to feel some gentle risings of ambition in my heart, as though it were possible that by the force of my talents I might do away with all objections to my eligibility. Several other gentlemen also came into the vestry, but they took very little notice of me; they talked about repairing and beautifying the chapel, and on such like matters—they were evidently great men—most

of them wholesale dealers, merchants, or perhaps even bankers. Some few years ago I saw a print in Hood's Whims and Oddities, or in one of the comic annuals, which called very vividly to my recollection the style and manner of these people; the print to which I refer, is that of a gentleman standing with his hands in his breeches pockets, and saying, "*My banks they are furnished.*"

I continued preaching for some time at this chapel without experiencing any attention from any individual, except my friend the wholesale linen-draper, till, one day, I was surprised and gratified at receiving a card inviting me to dine at the house of one of the congregation, who lived in the neighbourhood of Portman-square. He was a dry-salter by business, and was a very rich man; he still carried on business in the city, though his residence was at the west end of the town. When I read this card my heart fairly bounced and bumped with ecstacy; I was delighted, I was overjoyed, I almost regretted that I had paid so little attention to my personal appearance, and was half disposed to wear high shirt-collars on the occasion; but I was afraid that I should look more awkward than before, so I let the thing alone, only making myself as smart as my ordinary wardrobe

would allow. I took great pains to be punctual to the time appointed, and I found myself in a much more splendid mansion than I had ever yet visited—not that the house was very large, but it was fitted up with so much elegance and such an elaborate luxury of furniture: I almost for a moment fancied myself one of the aristocracy, and thought very humbly indeed of the little parlour at the back of my father's shop, and of the little Sunday parlour up stairs over the shop. My sensations of greatness, however, were considerably abated when my entertainer drew me aside from the group of his family and two or three visitors, and taking me into the back drawing-room, he said in a kind of half whisper, "When Mr.——," naming my friend the wholesale linen-draper, "engaged you to supply our chapel for twelve months, he did not give you any idea that the connexion was likely to become permanent?"

I bowed humbly and said, "He did not, sir."

"Oh, very well, I am glad to hear it, for I should be sorry that you should be deceived." Then looking down on my shoes, and seeing, I suppose, slight symptoms of dust on them, he said, "You have had a long walk, you had better take a coach when you return." So saying, he slipped a guinea into my hand to

pay my coach-hire, and then we went back again to the front drawing-room. I was very glad now that I had not put myself to the expense, nor my ears to the torture of high shirt-collars. The dinner was very excellent, and the conversation very animated, but I partook more largely of the first, than of the second, which was quite out of my way, being all about the price of stocks and Beethoven's music, forced strawberries, and Russian ambition. In a word, I never saw such elegant people in my life, and I did not think that there had been such among the dissenters. But I recollected having heard my mother frequently speak of the great increase of worldliness of spirit among the dissenters: indeed, she went so far as to say that it was not always easy to distinguish them from church-people; and I remember thinking at the time, that dissenters must be very bad indeed if they could not be distinguished from church-people.

Not many days after I had received this very fine dinner, and a guinea from the dry-salter, I had an invitation to the house of another of the congregation. This was not a great man, but what is called an active man. I do not mention names in this book, either of the living or of the dead, therefore I merely mention

that this second invitation was from a hardwareman, at that time living in Houndsditch, and carrying on a very flourishing business. He was an uneducated man, about forty years of age, and, as many persons of that age have forgotten what they have learned at school, so this gentleman had forgotten what he had not learned, or to speak more plainly, he had forgotten that he had never learned anything, and was by no means aware of the extent of his ignorance. At the time of which I am now writing, the Test and Corporation Acts had not been repealed, nor did there appear to be any immediate symptom that they speedily would be; and on this subject the worthy hardwareman was particularly eloquent, for having been successful in business, and being constitutionally ambitious, he meditated civic honours. This gentleman invited me to his house in Houndsditch, in consequence of having heard that I had been invited to the dry-salter's house at the west end of the town, for he was determined not to be outdone in courtesy and hospitality. He was in fact the leader of the democratic faction in the chapel which I was then supplying; and as he calculated the number of the democratic exceeded that of the aristocratic, he rather flattered himself that if matters came to

an extremity, he could carry any measure he pleased. I think that he over-rated his power, for I have frequently observed in the course of my life, that it is easier to raise a mob of clamourers against the opulent, than to collect a body of voters against them.—The hardware-man who lived in Houndsditch was very jealous of the dry-salter who lived in the neighbourhood of Portman-square, and it appeared to me that one motive which prompted the hardware-man to invite me to his house, was that he might hear from me how and in what style the dry-salter lived. I did not expect to be so minutely examined concerning the particulars of my dinner, but I exerted my powers of memory, and gave the best account that I possibly could. Indeed, I think it a failing of mine that I am in general so very communicative. I can keep a secret if I make a point of it, but there is a certain simplicity about me which leads me to speak freely whatever I know, and I, taking a great interest in my own affairs, fancy, perhaps erroneously, that others are equally interested in them; so I speak openly and copiously concerning myself, giving others in the game of life an advantage over me. It is well for me that I am not a whist-player, for my candour is such, that I should never be able to

conceal my hand from my opponents. This candour, I suppose it was, which induced me to inform the hardwareman of the conversation which took place between me and the dry-salter. At this the hardwareman took fire, and expressed himself strongly indignant at, what he was pleased to call, the insolence of the dry-salter. For my own part, I cannot say that I regarded the matter in the same light. I said that I felt myself incompetent to fill so high a station, and that as I was under obligations to the gentleman in question, I could not think of making myself a party in any transactions opposed to his inclinations, more especially as I knew from my friend the wholesale linen-draper, that the same was the sentiment of all the leading men of the place. I also modestly added, that I did not think myself gentleman enough to undertake so great a situation. I was indeed sincere in so saying, but I must also confess that there was something so very tempting in the prospect, that I thought that if I obtained the appointment, I might soon acquire gentility enough to bear myself handsomely in it.

Now my friend the hardwareman was any thing but a modest man, and had, of all men that I ever saw, as little apprehension or appreciation of the manners of a gentleman as any

one. He therefore over-ruled all my objections, and insisted that I should allow myself to be put in nomination for the vacant pulpit; indeed he was resolved upon proposing me, whether I would consent or not, for he said that he was sure that he could carry a majority of votes.—What an agitating feeling is ambition! it makes one's days restless, and one's nights sleepless. This I know was the case with me; for visions of glory, if I may so speak, were continually floating before my eyes, at the thought of being promoted, at the very outset of my career, to a station of such wealth and importance as that which now seemed to be ready to solicit my acceptance. The students of our college, I remember, used to speak very freely of the clergy of the established church, as being moved by a mere feeling of ambition, and pursuing the work of the ministry for what they could get by it; but I very strongly felt myself, at the time of which I am now writing, much more absorbed by temporal than by spiritual feelings,—I thought much of the gentility of the congregation, of the number of carriages that were every Sunday drawn up at the chapel doors, and of the very handsome income that would be derivable from this splendid source. —But, alas! the bubble soon burst; my friend

the hardwareman, at a vestry meeting of the subscribers to the chapel, proposed me as a fit and proper person to fill the vacant pulpit, but he was very coolly put down by being reminded that the congregation had resolved on suspending their determination till they had sufficiently weighed the merits of the many candidates which so important a situation must naturally attract. It was also added, with a particular emphasis, as I was informed, that so large a salary as that which was given by that congregation might command the best talents in the market. By this remark the hardwareman was given to understand that my talents were not the best in the market; indeed I never thought that they were,—only it is unpleasant to be told so.

Not long after this, my friend the wholesale linen-draper, by whose means I obtained the temporary engagement of supplying the pulpit for twelve months, and who I believe was a rational, good sort of man, and truly desirous of doing me a service, sent for me to dine with him, and gave me a great deal of good advice; among other things he fairly told me that I must not yet think of aspiring to a first-rate chapel, but that I had better look out for a situation in the country, where I might have a

little leisure to pursue my studies, to increase my stock of sermons, to enlarge my knowledge of human nature; for, as he very properly added, though London be a very large place, containing a vast number of inhabitants, and an immense variety of characters, yet it was by no means the best place to study human nature, especially for a young man. "A country town," said he, "is a grammar, but London is a great dictionary, or Thesaurus of human nature." He advised me to think humbly of myself, and I certainly did so, for I had very little encouragement, whatever inclination I might have had to think otherwise. I thanked him for his good advice; indeed I am always thankful for good advice, and in the course of my life, especially in the earlier part of it, I had a great deal to be thankful for. I do not know any set of persons who enjoy so much the privilege of receiving good advice as young dissenting ministers; they have so many kind and zealous friends, who in their zeal for their improvement are continually advising, correcting and admonishing them. But more of this matter hereafter.

CHAPTER IV.

My ambition of succeeding to the chapel in the City with carriages at the door, and hearers from the west-end of the town, having been blighted, and my year as *locum tenens* being expired, I was thrown for a time on my own resources, and was occasionally employed in preaching here and there; and as I had now become acquainted with many dissenting ministers, they were very glad of my occasional assistance, but very few could afford to pay me for my services, and every day this matter of payment became more important to me. At this time, I had the misfortune to lose my father, and at his death it appeared that his affairs were not in so flourishing a state as to allow of my living long as a gentleman, without doing something by way of increasing our resources. My brother took the business, such as it was, but I could not do much to assist him, because in the

first place I was a gentleman; in the second place, I did not understand the business; and in the third place, he did not want my assistance. Many of my readers may think, that they have heard of dissenting ministers being engaged in business, and so they have, but there is a difference between the regularly educated, and those who engage in the ministry without a regular education. As any person who is so inclined may become a dissenting minister, it not unfrequently happens that individuals brought up to business, and engaged in shop-keeping, undertake also the work of the ministry, and still continue their secular pursuits; but when a young man has received an academic education in order to fit him for the ministry, he very seldom has recourse to business unless he quits the ministry altogether; his resource in order to increase his income can seldom be anything else than the work of tuition. At this period of my life, I had no means of taking pupils, for my brother's house would not accommodate them, and I had not wherewithal to hire a house for myself. Therefore I began to beat about and to devise by what means I might earn my living as a gentleman. I verily think that an ingenious and observant writer, one who, as my friend the wholesale linen-

draper observed, had studied human nature by means of the grammar of a country town, and the dictionary or Thesaurus of a great metropolis, might compose a very pleasant and instructive essay on the inconveniences of being a gentleman. I once or twice did myself think of becoming an author, but as my education had not been very complete, and as the creative powers of my genius were not very great, and as I had been advised to think humbly of myself, I knew not what line of authorship to take up; for I was just as well qualified for one as for another. This I thought at the time an objection, but since I have seen more of the world, I have found many others in the same predicament. By way of becoming an author, I began to cast about in my mind, and inquire what books were most wanted just at that particular time, and unfortunately every subject seemed to be exhausted, or if by an apparently happy accident I fell upon what promised to be a good idea, I presently found that some one was beforehand with me. I meditated, as most becoming my profession, some sacred subject, and thought of composing an epic poem after the manner of Paradise Lost, for I thought that blank verse would not be nearly so much trouble as rhyme; indeed, it did not appear to me to

be much more difficult than prose. I looked over the Old and New Testaments, in order to find a subject, but I could scarcely find one that had not been used, the whole Bible had been done into verse before my time.

I had been considered as a very good theme writer at our college, and as I had several of these compositions in my possession, I repaired or recomposed them according to my enlarged knowledge and experience, and sent them severally to various magazines; but I could only get one of these papers inserted, and that very much abridged; and all the payment I got for it was, a copy of that month's magazine, and a very polite request from the proprietor, to contribute occasionally when my avocations afforded me leisure, or when the promptings of genius urged me to take up my pen. All the world is not like me, or I am sure that there would be no great consumption of pens, if they were only to be taken up on the promptings of genius. I ventured to mention to the proprietor of the magazine which did me the honour to insert a portion of one of my essays, that, though I was a gentleman, yet I was not too much of a gentleman to receive payment for my contributions, provided, I modestly added, that it was customary to pay contributors.

At the mention of payment, the countenance of the proprietor of the magazine, which had hitherto been as bland as a placid lake in the sunshine, underwent a change similar to that which takes place on the surface of a pond when a stingy breeze blows upon it from the north-east; his face was corrugated with a thousand wrinkles, and he said, "hum," and he said "ha," and he said "why;"—in short, I don't know what he said, but I knew pretty well what he meant, for the rest of his speech consisted of fragments, such as "new concern," "up-hill work," "great expense," "many gentlemen proud to write in the magazine." So his reply was something like one of the mouths of the Danube, all lost in marshes.

In the midst of my perplexities, and as I was sitting in the parlour over the shop, meditating what subject I could choose for an epic poem, I was agreeably interrupted by a call from my friend the wholesale linen-draper. He came to inform me that an elderly gentleman, a particular friend of his, who was the minister of a small congregation in the country, wished to have a young man to assist him in his duties, and that I had been strongly recommended to him, and that there was every probability that if I took pains to make myself acceptable, I

might ultimately succeed him. I gladly accepted the offer, and hastened to take my departure from the great metropolis. For the first time in my life, I was in a country town at a considerable distance from London. I need not describe a country-town to those who have seen one, and to those who have not seen one I cannot; it is enough to say that there was a market-place in it, and a town-hall, and a high-street, and a pump, and a church, and two or three meeting-houses, and a circulating library, and a mayor, and some aldermen, and some old maids, and a town-clerk, together with many other appendages which appear to be inseparably connected with the complex idea of a country-town.

The minister to whom I was here introduced, and whom I was destined for a time to assist, was a somewhat singular and very particular man. He had a small private fortune, so that he was not dependent on his flock; and this had been in the first instance a motive to induce them to choose him as their pastor, for they could not afford to give a large salary, and yet in order to stand well in the eyes of the world, they wished to have a pastor who should make a respectable appearance. But after some time they began in some degree to repent their

ther my text was from the Old or from the New Testament, I always told my hearers how the expression ought to have been translated, and what was the peculiar force and meaning of the original Greek or Hebrew. I never went so far as to quote Greek or Hebrew in the pulpit, or even Latin: I should have called that pedantry.

Now that I am on this topic, an anecdote occurs to my recollection, which, as it is somewhat amusing and appropriate, I think I may as well relate in this place. A fellow-student of mine, who had more ambition after the reputation, than talent or diligence for the acquisition of literature, preaching once at a country chapel or meeting-house, where the audience were for the most part rustics of the simplest class, suddenly became very eloquent, and burst forth in a declamation in praise of the fathers of the church, talking very learnedly about St. Augustin, St. Jerome, St. Chrysostom and others; at length he exclaimed, "Listen, I pray you, to the pathetic and soul-stirring words of St. Chrysostom, to which no translation can possibly do justice: *Propria quæ maribus tribuuntur mascula dicas.*" Just at the moment of his uttering this splendid quotation, his eye caught sight of our classical tutor, who

happened by some strange accident to be one of his hearers. The orator was for a moment thunderstruck, and was just going to blush and look foolish, but he had presence of mind to think that no good was to be got by blushing, so he put a bold face on the matter, and proceeded. The tutor never took any notice of the quotation, and the orator, when he tells the story, always adds that the classical gentleman took it for Greek.

At the town of X—, my time passed for a little while pleasantly enough. Being a modest young man, I always paid due deference to the old gentleman whose pulpit I supplied, and I listened to his advice, which he gave me quite as copiously as my good friend the wholesale linen-draper in London. I have observed that all the use which your friends wish you to make of advice is to listen to it, they never expect you to follow it. The listening to advice pleases them who give it; the following of it profits those who take it; and these are two different things. But not only was I acceptable to the old gentleman, I was also popular with the congregation, and was very frequently invited out—mostly to tea.

I was for some time very highly delighted, when on Monday mornings I used to stroll

about the town, and look in first at one house and then at another, and hear repeated commendations of the sermons which I had delivered on the preceding day. I cannot say that my fatigues on Sunday were very great, but it did so happen that I acquired a habit of lounging about on Monday mornings under pretence of resting from the fatigues of the Sunday. I must not indeed deny that the pleasure of hearing my sermons praised, contributed very much to keep up the practice of my Monday-morning visitings. By this habit I was also winning the hearts of the people, and weaning them away from their old pastor, who was not quite so much of a gossip as I was. There is something very imposing in the phrase "pastoral visit," but I fear that the thing itself is greatly abused, and that in too many instances they become mere talk and idle waste of time.

Perhaps some of my readers may be amused with a description of one of my Monday-morning lounges, and with an enumeration of the sort of people on whom I used to call, and the manner in which they used to talk about my sermons and prayers. The minister's dwelling, in which I was an inmate, was on the outskirts of the town, and in my way from his house to

the market-place, in which stood the circulating library and reading-room, it was absolutely necessary for me to go all through the High-street, in which several of the congregation lived, and all that lived in the High-street kept shops, and all that kept shops kept their shop-doors open, and it would have been very rude in me to pass by the shops of my hearers without turning my head round to give them the passing recognition of a nod. As Monday was also rather a leisure day with the shopkeepers in the town of X—, the natural consequence of my turning round to nod was my turning in to chat. This appeared purely accidental, but I knew it was intentional, and I believe they knew it to be so too. To whom then did it appear accidental? I really don't know, but I always used to endeavour to contrive to make it seem so.

The first shop that I came to in the course of my morning lounge was a grocer's and draper's, or what in the country is called a general shop, so called, I presume, because they don't sell any thing in particular. It was kept by a worthy, simple-hearted man, who had a smile and a pleasant word for every body; he had a wife and a numerous family, who were all very fond of talking; his eldest daughter,

however, was the oracle of the family; she was at the time that I lived at X— about thirty years of age or thereabouts; she was not pretty, but what she wanted in beauty she made up in wit. This young lady was the principal manager and directing genius of the Sunday-school belonging to the chapel; she beat up for recruits in all quarters, and by dint of great exertion, she collected a larger number of Sunday-scholars to the chapel than could be enumerated at any other chapel in the town. Her father had a tin box in his shop containing sugar candy; this tin box suffered much by his daughter's zeal, who bribed many an urchin by its sweet contents to become a pupil in her Sunday-school. In addition to her many other accomplishments, she was a poetess, and composed hymns to be sung by the children of the Sunday-school when charity sermons were preached to raise funds for its support. She was an excellent judge of sermons, and having a good memory, could repeat the most striking passages, and comment upon them with an eloquence all her own. Her style of talking was very rapid: she had bright little eyes, which sparkled as she spoke; and this, in addition to a little upward twist in the tip of her nose, gave her a look of extraordinary pertness.

But all this was very agreeable when the topic of her talk was the beauty of my sermons. In process of time, however, in order perhaps to show that her criticisms were not merely words of compliment and flattery, the young lady thought it necessary to throw in a little spice of censure, a very little; but little as it was, it was far too much to be agreeable to me. I did not always preach twice on Sunday, for sometimes the old gentleman found himself well enough to perform two duties out of the three, but if I had occasionally preached two sermons, I was by no means pleased to be told that one of them was better than the other, because thereby, it was intimated and implied, that one was not so good as the other. The reason why authors and preachers are more pleased to be told of their beauties than of their faults, is this, that they themselves being very modest, are perfectly aware of their own imperfections, but are not quite so conscious of their beauties. Being a modest young man, I patiently bore being told of my faults, and frequently expressed my thankfulness for the information, wisely remarking that they were our best friends who gave us advice whereby we might profit. There was another excellent feature in the character of this young lady, and that is, that so great

was her candour, that she not only told me very freely her own opinion of my sermons and prayers and general deportment, but she as liberally communicated to me the opinions of nearly all the rest of the congregation; for if any one wished me to know this, that, or the other, and felt any reluctance or shyness to tell me of it in so many words, they had nothing to do but to mention it to this daughter of the general shopkeeper, and she would inform me of it in the most delicate manner imaginable. Indeed, she used to boast that no one could speak so freely to me as she could; and she used always and very loudly to praise the good sense which I invariably displayed in not resenting the information, as some silly people would do. To give a specimen or two of the kind of animadversion to which I allude, I will mention a few matters which, though they may appear trifling to those who are not dissenting ministers, are yet matters of moment to those that are. There was an old lady who sat under the gallery on the right side of the pulpit, who was by no means deaf, but could not hear several sentences in the course of my sermons, because I occasionally dropped my voice, or turned too much to the left. There was a young lady who sat on the left side of the

pulpit, who was highly accomplished and very nervous, who frequently had the headache in consequence of the loudness of some of my tones. There was an old gentleman who complained that I spoke a great deal too fast, so that it was impossible for any one to understand me; and then presently afterwards, as ill luck would have it, there was a young gentleman who thought that my utterance was so slow, that the first part of a sentence was forgotten before the latter part was pronounced. There was a school-master who said that he had several times detected me in the improper use of the aspirate, and once he went so far as to affirm that I said *vicked* instead of *wicked.* Some complained that I did not use scriptural language enough in my prayers; others wished that my sermons were not quite so metaphysical; and from others I heard the complaint that my style was too florid and ornamented. But still I was very much liked, and was decidedly a general favourite, only I wanted one or two little improvements in order to be quite perfect. All these things were told me quite in confidence, and with the purest intention of doing me a service. In like manner, as touching my general demeanour and deportment, I found that many eyes were upon me, and that my

friends were as anxious for my perfection out of the pulpit. For instance, I was told by my monitress of the general shop, that I had been accused of reading novels; now I knew it was very wicked to read novels in general, but I thought that there was no harm in reading those of Walter Scott; but my friend observed that a novel was a novel, and I could not deny it. Some persons also, not of the congregation, used, I was told, to remark that I could have but little time for reading and composing sermons, for I might be always seen walking about the town; but it was very kindly said for me that while I was walking I was thinking. Once it was gently intimated to me, that it had been observed at a house where I had supped, that after supper I had mixed some gin and water for myself, in which the gin was as much in quantity as the water; but my informant kindly said that she did not believe the statement, and begged me not to make myself at all uneasy about the matter, and to take no notice of it whatever, only to be more on my guard for the future. This was very kind, was not it? Another inaccuracy of demeanour brought against me, was, that I made my visits more frequently to some of the congregation than to others, and that when I did call at some houses

my stay was very short. I believe there may be some truth in this, and as I have detained my reader very long at the general shop at the beginning of the High-street, I will now proceed with my walk, and when I come to the next residence of one of the congregation, it may appear that there was some cause for the brevity of my visits.

The next open shop-door at which I was in the habit of calling, was at a corn-chandler's. It was a very small shop, having just room enough for a narrow counter, and a row of narrow bins behind it, with horse-beans, oats, barley, pollard, and such like articles, and all was very neat,—and the master was very neat, and his wife was very neat: they were elderly people, and themselves and one maid servant were all their establishment. The master was always in the shop, sitting on a high stool at a little desk, looking at his ledger through his spectacles; the mistress was always in the little parlour behind the shop, and the maid was always in the little kitchen behind the parlour. I will not say that the corn-chandler and his wife were actually dumb, because I knew they were not; but to all practical purposes they were as near to it as possible. When I went into the shop, all that the master of it would

say, was, "How do you do? Mrs. —— is in the parlour."—And when I went into the parlour, all that Mrs. —— would say, was, "How do you do? did you see Mr. —— as you came through the shop?" This was the extent of their vocabulary, and as they neither of them read, and neither of them thought, I could not extort another word from them except the monosyllable "yes" or "no," to any thing that I chanced to say. They certainly merited, in a very high degree, the eulogium which was universally bestowed upon them, that they were inoffensive and quiet sort of people; but I could not make my visits to them very long, for if I had, I should have fallen asleep, and that would have been rude.

A little farther on in the street was a very smart-looking shop in the Birmingham and Sheffield and general cutlery line, kept by a middle-aged bachelor, a stout swaggering sort of man, who would not have been a fool if he had not thought himself wise. He was held in very great esteem by himself, but in less by his neighbours, and especially by the congregation, who did not think him a sufficiently serious man; nor indeed can I say that he was very serious;—he was a stickler for liberty, and though I do not believe that he ever had the

Age of Reason in his possession, I am certain that he possessed and admired the Rights of Man. He was an active man both in the town and in the chapel. Though he was a dissenter, yet he was a regular attendant, and a great speaker at parish vestry meetings, and particularly delighted in what he called "basting the parson." I should be sorry to say any thing uncharitable of any one, or even to report an uncharitable saying; but I think there was a great deal of truth and point in a saying that was current in the town of X—, concerning this gentleman, namely, that he was only a dissenter because he was not a church-man. His parlour was ornamented with many portraits and busts of public characters, such as Cobbett, Sir Francis Burdett, Colonel Wardle, Benjamin Franklin, Lord Erskine, General Washington, Napoleon Bonaparte, and Dr. Priestley. This last picture was a great stumbling-block to many serious persons in the congregation, who thought that it gave strong indications of a leaning to Socinianism. The cutler, however, strenuously denied the justice of the inference, and contended that he reverenced Dr. Priestley as a man of science, and as a friend of civil and religious liberty. He was also a constant reader of Cobbett's Poli-

tical Register, and of the Monthly Magazine, at that time published by Sir Richard Phillips; but I don't think that he was a great admirer of the Evangelical Magazine. This gentleman was always very civil and friendly to me, but he could very seldom remember any part of my sermons. Being a person of some considerable wealth, he had a square pew to himself in one corner of the chapel under the gallery, and by way of distinction there was a short calimanco curtain drawn round the top of it, and I greatly fear that he took advantage of that curtain to go to sleep behind it,—for nobody could see him.

While I was in the town of X—, there happened one of those changes which have been by far too common in England of late years: I mean the transmutation of a Presbyterian into an Unitarian chapel. I introduce this anecdote here because I am reminded of it by the reminiscence of the cutler. The change of this chapel from Presbyterian to Socinian, or Unitarian as they were pleased to term it, took place in the following manner. There was in the town of X— a large Presbyterian chapel capable of accommodating at least a thousand hearers, and the time had been, in the memory of some old persons living when I was there,

that the chapel was quite full, even crowded, for many persons came to worship there from the neighbouring villages. But of late years the congregation had sadly dwindled away, for the preacher, though a very good sort of man, as he was called, was exceedingly indefinite in his religious views, and generally confined himself to moral discourses, and those of a very meagre kind; or if by chance he touched upon any gospel truths, he slurred them over with a most unprofitable generalization. So at last, when he died, the whole number of hearers amounted to little more than seventy or eighty persons. There was among them one individual of considerable opulence, a brewer, who was a gentleman-like sort of man, and one of the leading personages in the town. This gentleman scarcely made any secret of his Socinian principles, for he possessed almost all Dr. Priestley's writings, and used to be very free in his conversation on religious topics. He also used to take in a Socinian magazine, called, I believe, The Monthly or Theological Repository, and which has of late years assumed a more general character.

Although the Presbyterian chapel was then nearly deserted of its worshippers, there were not lacking candidates for the vacant

pulpit, for each one hoped that by his talents and exertions he might revive the fallen interest. The brewer, however, was fully determined to have a Socinian; and for that purpose he made several new subscribers, who outvoted the old ones, and so a Socinian preacher was established in the old Presbyterian chapel. The old subscribers fell off, and went away to other chapels or the church, and the new subscribers not caring much about the matter, did not stay long there; the consequence of which was, that the opulent brewer, and two or three of his friends, and some dozen or two of his dependents, had the chapel all to themselves, but they had not the entire burden of supporting the minister, for there was an endowment belonging to the chapel, which formed the greater part of the preacher's salary.

The preacher, who was a very young man, was exceedingly conceited, and for a minister I think far too much of a dandy. He looked as if he thought himself a very enlightened personage, destined to produce a great mental revolution in the town of X—, by preaching to the people a new system of theology which had never been thought or heard of before. He had not been long installed in his new situation when he sent the town-crier round the town

with handbills announcing that he was going to deliver a course of lectures on the principal doctrines of Christianity, just as if there had been no faithful preachers of Christian doctrine before his time; but the fact was, that his lectures were to be *against* the principal doctrines of Christianity. But the people of X— did not pay much heed to him; a few only of the brewer's friends went once or twice out of civility to him, and they were soon tired, for they did not like to see a place of worship converted into a forum for sceptical discussion. Among the rest, however, the cutler went, and more than once, and no one wondered at it; for, let him say what he would, it was as clear as daylight that he had a strong hankering after Socinianism. He very much wished me to go and hear the man, in order that I might refute him,—so he said; but I strongly and truly suspected that the young Socinian preacher was desirous of obtaining an antagonist merely for the sake of acquiring some celebrity, and making a noise in a quiet town. I consulted with the old gentleman whose pulpit I supplied, and he said, "Let him alone, let him alone,—ten years hence he will either be a Christian or an infidel; he is now neither one nor the other."

Finding that he could not attract a theological notice from the dissenters, the young man tried what he could do with the church; so he attacked the Establishment, preached against tithes, the Thirty-nine Articles, and the Athanasian Creed; he also wrote long letters in the county newspaper, insulting the whole body of the clergy, calling them, by implication, knaves or fools, but telling them at the same time, what a great respect he had for their hearts and understandings. It was all in vain; he could excite no attention; for all that he could say was but a repetition of the old sophisms of Tom Paine and others of that class, which were all new to this young gentleman, but stale enough to the rest of the world.

I have introduced this matter in this place because it was suggested by a mention of this liberal cutler, who, notwithstanding all his declarations, did, some time after I left the town of X—, join himself to the Socinians. I used very frequently to talk to him about the matter, and to caution him concerning the danger in which he stood; but he replied that it was but fair to hear both sides; that he was not afraid that his faith could be shaken, and that it was only following the advice of the

apostle, to try all things and hold fast that which is best. But I thought that a man could not know much about Christianity if he did not know when he had got that which is best.

CHAPTER V.

It is of course not to be expected that I should enumerate and minutely describe every individual of the congregation, for that would be tedious to the reader, and difficult to the writer, inasmuch as many of them were not remarkable either for one thing or another; it is enough that I should speak of those who were most prominent and most influential. The reader will now have the goodness to suppose me as having passed through the High-street, and to have entered the market-place. I have spoken, in the preceding chapter, of the conversion of a Presbyterian into an Unitarian chapel, and in this chapter I have to speak of the transmutation of a barber into a gentleman. When I lived in the town of X—, there was, and I believe there still is, in the market-place a very smart shop, occupied by a hair-dresser and perfumer;

indeed, I am not quite certain that the hair-dressing be not now quite done away with, for when I was there, I saw symptoms of the jewellery and trinket department gradually superseding the hair-dressing part of the establishment, which even then the principal himself never touched with his own hands, but consigned to a foreman and certain articled pupils. The time was, I am told, when this person kept a small shop near the outskirts of the town, and thought it not beneath his dignity to have sticking thereout a barber's-pole; nor did he disdain to shave for two-pence, or to cut hair for three-pence. Small and humble was the stock that his shop contained, for he derived his living rather from the industry of his hands than from the emoluments of merchandize. In his window there might have been seen some nine or ten pots of pomatum, piled up pyramidically, divers horn combs dangling upon a string, some half-dozen black-handled razors, a few squares of Windsor-soap, one or two wooden shaving-boxes, and half-a-dozen old wigs, which had lost much of their original colour and comeliness, and which failed to find purchasers even at the low rate of three-and-sixpence each. By degrees, however, this good man got on in the world, and took a shop in

the market-place; and when I was at X—, his window, instead of a meagre exhibition of horn combs and fly-blown pomatum-pots, was filled with a gay selection of essences, and extracts, and cut glass bottles, and Macassar oil, and eau de Cologne, and eau de this, and eau de that, and eau de t'other; so that, on a fine Summer's day, you might smell his shop all across the market-place. This gentleman was a widower, and had a family of five or six daughters, very accomplished, but in the habit of dressing on Sundays rather too gaily for a dissenting meeting-house. Both they and their father complained very much of the pride of the town of X—, but I rather incline to think that they should have complained more of their own inordinate ambition; for when was it ever known that the family of a hair-dresser, or even perfumer and not hair-dresser, was admitted to an intimacy with the family of an attorney or an apothecary? The idea is utterly absurd.

I was indebted for my knowledge of the humble origin of the exalted perfumer to the young lady who was mentioned in the last chapter, the eldest daughter of the general shop-keeper; this young lady knew every thing about every body in the town, and very kindly told every body every thing she knew, but always in per-

fect confidence, as a matter never to be mentioned again on any account whatever. It is a peculiar privilege of dissenting ministers, and a natural consequence of their pastoral visits in a little country-town, where people have not much to do, to hear all the gossip and talk of the town. I was not much accustomed to this kind of thing when I first went to X—, and it struck me as an impropriety, and I thought it my duty to preach against gossip, but my labour was not thankfully received. Indeed, while I was actually preaching, I perceived symptoms of disapprobation in the looks of the congregation: the daughter of the general shop-keeper looked very indignant; her face was red with indignation, and her whole countenance was quite animated with scorn. On the following morning, when I called to have my sermons praised as usual, I met with very black looks. The young lady was bitterly angry, and she wondered how any Christian minister could be so unmindful of the dignity of the pulpit as to neglect the sublime truths of the gospel for mere heathen morality, and that too, of the poorest and most meagre kind. "Besides," said she, with a peculiarly triumphant emphasis, "how could you think of preaching against a fault of which you must know

none of the congregation are guilty?" To this I certainly could say nothing; and I felt that if they had been any of them guilty of prating about what was no business of theirs, I had been quite as guilty of listening to the prate; and then, I afterwards thought, that I was absolutely ungrateful to find fault with that gossip, which had been to me a means of amusement. I took care never again to say a word against gossipping; and now am myself become as good a gossip as the best of them. Truly I think that I am writing my memoirs in a gossipping kind of way,—discoursing more about others than myself, and that I am led off from one topic to another in a strangely digressive style. Well, there is no remedy for it, and I must even so proceed.

The perfumer was not much of a critic of sermons, but as he had the means of keeping a horse, on which he used to ride in the morning before business began, and in the evening after business was done, he found himself an excellent judge of horseflesh. He was a stout, portly-looking man, and when he was mounted on horseback, he was nearly as grand in his look as a city marshal at the Lord Mayor's show. He was ambitious: alas, how widely and how deeply does ambition spread! I used

to think when I was a boy, that ambition only had to do with emperors, and kings, and conquerors, and that nothing beneath a throne could be the object of ambition; but I found that I was wrong: the perfumer was ambitious of being a deacon in the chapel at X—, but there were certain objections to him on the score of literary deficiency, which could not be easily got over, nor very pleasantly stated to him. This disappointment mortified him, and rankled deeply in his bosom; he once or twice told me that he thought he had been exceedingly ill used in the matter, seeing that another had been appointed to the office, who was not nearly so respectable a man as himself, nor so well to do in the world. I pitied him, but could not help him, and was only sorry to find that intrigue and injustice found their way into all societies.

From the perfumer's shop my next transition generally was to the library and news-room. There were more circulating libraries in the town than one, but the principal was that which had a news-room connected with it, and was kept by one of the congregation to which I had the honour of preaching. The keeper of the library was a widow, whose chief characteristic was the severity with which she

regarded the failings and faults of mankind, mingled with a very lively feeling of the evils or inconveniences to which she herself was subject. Whether she practised grumbling because she was naturally and constitutionally eloquent, or whether she became eloquent from the practice of grumbling, I could not tell. A pleasant anecdote is told of this good lady, which I had from the general shop near the end of the High-street,—that she was so incessant in her lamentations to the butcher about bones in the meat, that he said to her, "Madam, when I kill a beast without bone, you shall have a joint of it."—For my part, I never dared pass a day without calling to see her; for if I did, I should have to undergo a most dismal expostulation from her. Then there was such a mournfulness in her style; it was not a good downright sturdy sort of grumble, it was all sorrowfulness, and almost, nay, sometimes quite, crying. She used to say that she felt herself a burden to every one; and when any one came to see her, she used to express herself so deeply obliged by the very kind attention, though at the same time any omission of such civility would provoke a serious fit of lamentation. She converted, or rather perverted every thing into the means of

mournfulness. She had the knack of making things joyful the means of sadness. Her thankfulness was lamentable; she had a kind of piety, peculiar, I think, to herself, for every painful or unpleasant circumstance in life she regarded as a punishment for her sins, and every thing that was pleasant, prosperous, or agreeable, set her upon grieving at the thought that it was more than she deserved. In dry weather she thought that the earth would be parched up, and that all vegetation would perish; and in wet weather, if she could not see a rainbow, she thought that another deluge was coming to sweep away the inhabitants of the earth. She saw in the world nothing but sin and sorrow. She used to say that ministers of the gospel should never laugh, that they wore black to intimate that they were in mourning for the sins of the world. I was not myself much addicted to laughing when I was a young man, but now and then, I must acknowledge, that I was excited to very loud and very long laughter; as, for instance, when I heard the story of the preacher quoting "*Propria quæ maribus*" as the eloquent language of St. Chrysostom, I will confess that I laughed heartily for two or three hours; indeed, I scarcely got quite over the fit in two days.

It was my business, and the reader may easily suppose that it was no sinecure, to cultivate the good will of all these people whom I have above described, and a great many more whom I have not described, in order to secure to myself the reversion of a situation worth about one hundred and thirty pounds per annum, and this salary was only to be enjoyed so long as I should give general satisfaction; for though a dissenting minister, when once elected by a congregation, cannot be by them legally dismissed, yet it is in the power of any individuals of the congregation to withdraw themselves and their subscriptions, and so to starve a minister out, as the phrase is. Therefore, a dissenting minister had need be a very discreet man to keep his place and its full emoluments, which, by the way, are not very full after all. But where the influential and ruling part of the congregation is hostile to a minister, there are other ways of annoyance, and means of getting rid of him. I once knew an instance of the trustees or managers of some chapel, actually taking the roof off the building, so that if the minister persisted in using the pulpit, he was exposed to the weather, whatever it might be. But things seldom come to this extremity; for the minister has sagacity

enough to know that if he were to show himself very contumacious in one place, he would find it no easy matter to obtain another;—therefore when his congregation begins to grow dissatisfied with him, and weary of his discourses, because they want novelty; and impatient of his admonitions, because they imply a want of spiritual perfection on their part, then he generally takes the hint of the withdrawal of their subscriptions, and looks out for some other situation; but if he be past the middle of life, and be not of a popular or attractive style of address, then he must patiently endure his situation, taking from year to year a decreased, and still decreasing salary, and live in the latter days of his life under the painful reproach of having preached his congregation away: this preaching the congregation away, is a common phrase among the dissenters, and implies that people go to a place of worship more for the amusement of the preaching, than for the solemnity and duty of prayer; nor am I quite certain that the reproach does not in a great degree extend itself to members of the establishment. Some of my readers may inquire, what then becomes of those poor old ministers who have outlived the popularity and attractiveness of their younger days? They

do not indeed have recourse to the parish, but I fear that some of them suffer great privations. I once knew a meek and timid man, not past the middle of life, but sadly deficient in that kind of energy which renders a minister attractive in the pulpit, who was requested to withdraw from his situation, to make way for a more popular and attractive preacher; the request nearly broke his heart, but he did not dare refuse, so he gave up his income of about one hundred a-year, and was glad to accept an offer of twenty pounds a-year from a small village congregation; and by the help, I believe, of a small school, he did at that time manage to keep himself off the parish. This occurred many years ago, and I knew the man but slightly; the particulars, however, as I have stated them, I knew perfectly. There are, amongst the several denominations of dissenters, charitable funds raised for the relief of poor ministers, and certainly amongst the people are many kindly disposed individuals, who, however, can never counteract the evils of a system radically bad. These charitable funds are raised by congregational collections, and when charity sermons are preached for that purpose, the preacher of course tries all he can to awaken the sympathies of his audience, and

to excite their compassion; for this purpose, he will sometimes read letters from the poor ministers themselves, descriptive of their sufferings and privations. I have heard many of these letters, and they have excited a very painful feeling in my mind. Sometimes an applicant for relief states that he has a salary of only thirty pounds a-year; that he keeps a little school, which just serves to pay his rent; that he has a wife and seven or eight children, the eldest not more than twelve years of age, and he speaks with an affectionate commendation of his wife's industry, who, in order to assist the family just to keep decently alive, employs herself in millinery or straw bonnet-making. Then he prays for the usual annual donation of five pounds, which may serve, so his letter says, to purchase bacon and potatoes for the winter. This is literally true. But notwithstanding the multifarious industry of this poor man, he is still dependent on his congregation, not only for his salary, but for his school, or at least a part of it, and also for the work of millinery which his wife is engaged in; for if he offend his congregation, they can not only withdraw their subscriptions, and so diminish his salary of thirty pounds, but they can remove their children from his school, and their custom

from his wife; and in addition to this, they can take away his character, and this indeed is a natural consequence of their quarrel with him, for in order to vindicate themselves to their neighbours for plunging a poor man into still deeper poverty, they must accuse him, or, by implication, they accuse themselves. It may be wondered at, how it should happen that any man not independent of the world, should ever undertake the work of the ministry; but the truth is, that young men are attracted by the popularity and apparent success of the favoured few, just as people are induced to purchase tickets in the lottery, by thinking more of the half-dozen prizes than of the ten thousand blanks. But I must return to my narrative.

I calculated wrongly in supposing that by going as an assistant to an elderly minister, I should be almost sure of succeeding him, because I should for so long a time have the whole field to myself without a rival, and so ensure the affections, and good will of the people. I was wrong, for I not only had time to charm by my novelty, but time also to weary by my want of novelty. The life of the old gentleman was protracted beyond expectation, and instead of any decay of power or increase of feebleness, he seemed to grow stronger as

life advanced; so that now and then he would on an emergency undertake the whole day's duty by himself, and he began to think that he might do without an assistant. So he gave me opportunity of looking round about in the neighbouring towns to find some other vacancy. I knew, however, that he was not long for this world, and therefore thought that if I could but contrive to occupy my time, till he should be totally laid aside by death or by hopeless infirmity, I should be tolerably sure of succeeding him. Just at this time there happened one of those divisions, which are but too common among dissenters, and that was in a large town about fifteen miles distant from the place at which I was then residing. There was a large chapel in that town, numerously and respectably attended, the minister of which had officiated in the place upwards of five-and-twenty years. When he first came, he succeeded an elderly man whose powers, never very great, had been attenuated to next to nothing during his latter years. The new minister, when he was new, was immensely popular. He was regarded as a very Solomon for wisdom, and a Demosthenes for eloquence. His congregation, had it not been that their shops and merchandise required their attention, would have been glad to sit all

day long, all the week through, to hear him preach. But, alas! hot love is soonest cold. For the first five years he was a God to them, for the next fifteen a mortal, and for the last five a devil; and yet I was afterwards told by unbiassed observers, that he was no farther altered from what he was five-and-twenty years ago, than every man naturally must be by the lapse of so many years, and that whatever alteration had taken place in him was for the better, for that his understanding was strengthened, and his knowledge increased. But he was no longer a novelty; his discourses had ceased to be stimulating; he could no longer amuse his flock with the dramatism of devotion. Their imaginations were no longer excited, their ears were not tickled, so that they fancied their devotion was growing cool, through lack of zeal on the part of their minister. Therefore they began to find fault with him, to send him anonymous letters, to accuse him of want of orthodoxy; in a word, they were tired of him, even though he had been their own voluntary and cheerful choice. They had nothing substantially serious to allege against him, so all their charges were of course of the most indefinite and shadowy nature; and because he was not sufficiently eloquent in the pulpit for their amuse-

ment, they were more than sufficiently eloquent against him out of the pulpit. The charges brought against him were of the most frivolous kind. Who would imagine, for instance, that a charge of Sabbath-breaking should be brought against a man because he was seen to put a letter in the post on Sunday evening? Some went so far as to say that he had been even known to read a newspaper on the Sabbath-day. His conduct was watched, and commented upon in its minutest movements; all manner of idle tales were circulated concerning him, and every endeavour was made use of to bring him into contempt with the people of the town who were not of his flock, and who had no connexion with him whatever, but who had generally held him in estimation because they thought that he was generally estimable; and so he truly was, and so he actually would have been in any other situation than in that of a dissenting minister. I do not intend hereby to insinuate that the dissenters are essentially and constitutionally a more unreasonable set of people than any others in the world, but it is their peculiar, their voluntary system, that brings them into these perplexities.

I had been once or twice on a visit to the large town, of which I have been speaking

above, and I had preached in the chapel twice; and as I had taken with me my best sermons, and had delivered them in my best style, I passed among the people for a very fine man.

I did not know at the time so much about the matter as I know now, nor did I regard things in the light that I do now, otherwise I should not quite so heartily have enjoyed the flattering commendations that were bestowed upon my pulpit performances. The people of this congregation were always glad to hear a stranger, as a kind of relief from, what they called, the dull and heavy monotony of their stated pastor. I have since heard that some of the ruder sort of people used to tell him to his face, that it was quite a treat to hear a stranger. A man of any spirit, it might be said, would at once leave a congregation capable of such heartless rudeness. But there were considerations of a serious nature weighing with this gentleman, that prevented so decisive a step, for he had a family to maintain, and few, if any other means of maintaining them, than the profession to which he had been brought up, and in which he had been engaged for thirty years and upwards, —and being past the middle of life, and having a family, he was doubtful whether he could

find another congregation ready to receive him; for those congregations that give a salary large enough to maintain a family, generally expect to have for a new minister a young man of shining talents. Dissenting congregations, in the choice of a minister, are not only influenced by the consideration of what he may be to themselves, but they have a view to the appearance which he may make in the eyes of the world; and so long as he is acceptable to them, they take care to extol him to their neighbours, and to speak of him as a model of all that is good in heart, and wise in understanding; but when they grow weary of him, and wish to get rid of him, they desire to be kept in countenance by their neighbours, and to vindicate themselves for their want to change: then they speak slightingly, and even accusingly of him, bringing against him, for want of some great charge, a great number of little charges, which, being exaggerated and dwelt upon, produce a great impression; and as a dissenting minister lives in great familiarity with his congregation, they know all his movements; and one or other individual is sure to be acquainted with his unguarded expressions, and vain thoughts; and it must be a wonderful man indeed, who, in the course of five-and-twenty years, should neither

do or say anything foolish or blameworthy. Thus is a dissenting minister much in the power of his congregation, if they choose to use that power; and that they sometimes do use it, I know for a fact.

In the congregation of which I am now writing, there was by no means an unanimous feeling against the minister, for had that been the case, I am very sure that he could not have kept his situation at all; there was only a minority against him, but that was a somewhat large and very active minority; and as they could not get rid of him, they resolved upon setting up a new concern for themselves, and for that purpose they at first hired a room, and as I was at leisure, they invited me to be their minister. They made out to me a very plausible case, and they vindicated themselves with much ingenuity from all imputation of fickleness, of schism, or of injustice; and I, by means of my youth and inexperience, was led to think all that I heard to be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I certainly had no impression of a seriously unfavourable nature against the deserted minister, but I thought that he had been guilty of many follies and imprudences, and I thought of him nearly as those about me did, or perhaps nearly as they

wished me to think, for my mind was at that time open to receive any impressions. I was indeed, from the first, very credulous and simple, as the reader of this rambling narrative may perceive.

CHAPTER VI.

THE simplest people in the world, if they be exposed to many vicissitudes in life, will have their eyes opened at last; but the opening comes on, in some cases, very slowly. So it was with me; but the removal from the town of X—, to, what I shall call, the town of Y—, helped a little to disperse some of the blindness which in me was very great. I may as well mention here, though a little bit out of course, that I never returned to the town of X—; for, about six months after my departure, the old gentleman died; and the congregation having been informed of a promising young man, just come out, thought no more of me; but after hearing this young man for two Sundays, became so enamoured of him as to give him an unanimous invitation. I afterwards became acquainted with him, and he told me that his congregation used to speak very contemptuously

of me, especially the young lady, the daughter of the general shopkeeper at the beginning of the High-street. This is enough for the town of X—. I now proceed with my new residence.

I felt myself at first rather uncomfortable in this place, because I seemed to be a kind of rival or opponent of a brother minister, with whom I ought rather to have been upon terms of civility and friendship; but this unpleasant feeling soon abated, in consequence of an accidental meeting with the gentleman, who, with much cordiality of manner, took care to assure me, that he had no ill-will towards me, and that he hoped to have the honour of my acquaintance; this was a considerable relief to me.

There was, however, another matter, a very great difficulty, as to ordination; perhaps this requires explanation to some readers. There is a difference between the ordination of clergymen, and the ordination of dissenting ministers. Clergymen are ordained by bishops, but dissenting ministers are ordained by one another. Clergymen are ordained before they commence their ministerial duties, dissenting ministers not till they have a call from some congregation; and their ordination is by two or three ministers, chosen by themselves and their congregation. The difficulty in my case was this: the neigh-

bouring ministers, who were the most natural and proper persons to officiate at the ordination, thought that the minister from whom the secession had taken place, had not been fairly and honourably treated, and they were rather shy of countenancing the secession, yet they were rather afraid of speaking too strongly and too decidedly on the matter, because they had an instinct which told them that it would be very imprudent in them, to countenance any rebellion of ministers against their people; therefore they abstained from joining in my ordination, under pretence of personal acquaintance with the deserted minister. In time, however, and after some trouble, four ministers were found, who consented to co-operate in my ordination. One of them prayed the ordination prayer, another asked me various questions concerning my faith, another gave me a solemn charge as to my ministerial duties, and the fourth preached to the people, telling them their duty. It was a very solemn and affecting service, and we afterwards all dined together at a public-house. But still even then my mind misgave me; I was not altogether satisfied that these people had acted quite properly and in a true Christian spirit, in forming this secession; I could

not help entertaining an idea that it was something besides religion that influenced them.

After the ordination another difficulty arose; it was to be paid for. Our dinner at the public-house cost something, and as the four ordaining ministers came from a considerable distance, the expenses of their journey were to be paid. Hitherto not a word had been said about my salary; but as I was a single man, it was intimated that a small salary would suffice. When, however, the expenses of the ordination were deducted from the funds of the society, the treasurer's account had a very ugly look, and the difficulty was how to make it look handsomer. They had been at a great expense in hiring and fitting up the room, and they began to talk to me as the proprietor of the magazine did, about "up-hill work." Alack-a-day! I began to fear that it would be presently down-hill work. At length, after much talking, arrangement, and discussion, it was resolved that my salary should be sixty pounds for the first year, and afterwards to increase as the congregation should increase; so it should seem that my success was to depend much on my own exertions.

Well now, this seems plausible enough, and mightily ingenious is the arrangement; for under the idea that things are to be improved

by diligence, the young man exerts all his strength, exhausts his originality and his eloquence, gives the best of his services for sixty pounds a-year, and then what are the dregs of his mind worth? Of this I thought not then; but being full of hope, and full of zeal, and of a tolerably contented mind, I preached and toiled with great earnestness, and not without success. My new congregation was mightily pleased with me, and took care to spread my fame far and wide, extolling me as one of the most miraculous geniuses that they had ever met with. As in a large town there are generally many persons who do not know what to do with themselves on Sunday, and therefore go strolling about from one chapel or church to another, and as I was the last imported pulpit novelty in the place, and as my flock had been pleased in the ardour of their zeal to represent me to the world in favourable colours, many of these unsettled strollers used to come and hear me. The sight of every strange face was a stimulus to exertion, and a prompter to my eloquence; and I began to think that I was about to glide triumphantly through life, having my sails filled with the *aura popularis*.

It was soon discovered that the room which we occupied as a place of worship was much

too small for us, and as it was impossible to hire a larger, it became absolutely necessary to build a chapel. How well do I remember the rapture with which I gazed upon the plan, section, and elevation of the new chapel, and how cordially did we enter into the discussion whether it should be called Salem, or Ebenezer, or Bethel, or Bethlehem chapel. There was one consideration which gave us a little trouble, though not much, not quite so much perhaps as it ought, and that was, how the building was to be paid for. The most moderate estimate that we could possibly get was six hundred pounds, and as there was every probability that there would be a considerable addition to our numbers when we should have a respectable building to accommodate them in, it was thought very unadvisable to make the chapel too small, lest there should be necessity to enlarge it as soon almost as it was built. One of the congregation, the principal person indeed, an opulent linen-draper, subscribed towards the building of the chapel as much as fifty pounds. Stimulated by this liberal contribution, others of the congregation came forward with their donations; some more and some less, till altogether they realized the sum of two hundred pounds, which was thought a very considerable

sum for so small a congregation. Then it was calculated, that when the chapel was built, there would be such an accession to the number of hearers, that the seat-rents and other matters would pay a great part of the remainder, and that under all circumstances there might very justly lie an appeal to the religious public.

So the chapel was commenced, and I was foolish enough to be mightily pleased with it, for it was a great gratification to my vanity, inasmuch as it was owing to my popular talents, that there was necessity to erect a chapel. I never considered that the great expense of the building would diminish the power of the congregation to increase my salary, and that if there should be an accession to our numbers after the building was finished, the increased funds would be wanted to liquidate the debt, and could not, for some time to come, be available to the purpose of adding to my income. I might also have considered, that if the congregation should not be increased, the expense of the chapel would absorb all the means of the contributors, and leave me rather worse off than before.

The chapel was built, and then there must be a kind of religious festival at the opening of it, and ministers of eminence must be brought

from a distance, in order to give *eclât* to the concern. Here, then, was another expenditure, similar to that which took place at my ordination; but as there were three sermons preached, and a collection made after each of them in aid of the building, there was quite enough collected to pay that day's expenses, and I believe a little more.

As the congregation had, in order to do homage to my talents, and to give me room to display myself to the world, put themselves to the expense of building a chapel, I could not expect, of course, that they would soon be able to increase my salary; and, as if with a view of preventing any such application from me, they began of themselves to lament to me the great difficulty that they had in providing for my salary, after the great expense they had been at in building a new chapel for me. I took all this very patiently, though I must say that it was rather too bad to charge the new chapel to my account; however, I thought that it did not become me as a Christian minister to manifest any particular anxiety after money. They knew my conscientious feelings on that point, and took advantage of me accordingly, and yet, why should I blame them? Is it not the universal practice of the world to get everything

as cheaply as possible? The chapel was opened, and as it was built on purpose for me, I was of course placed under a kind of necessity of using all my exertions to fill it. I preached accordingly with great diligence; I studied hard to make learned and eloquent sermons, and I delivered them with great energy of manner, and gained very high commendation; but still there was no very visible increase of the congregation, and certainly no increase of my salary.

The debt on the chapel now began to be burdensome, and an appeal was made to the religious public by means of advertisements in the religious magazines, in which there had been previously inserted a full and elaborate account of the building and opening of the chapel; but not a word was said of the origin of the chapel, or that it was only built out of opposition; — the world thus thought that our sect was increasing, whereas, in fact, it was only dividing.

Our advertisements did not answer; very few contributions came in, and now there seemed to be no other resource than for me to take a journey round the country, going from town to town, and making personal application to the most opulent and liberal of our sect. It was with

some reluctance that I consented to this arrangement, but there was no help for it. During my absence, the worship of the chapel was to be conducted by the deacons, in order to save the expense of a supply, and my journey was to be paid for out of the monies collected by me,—an intimation being given to me that I must travel as economically as possible. I was never to travel inside the stage-coach, and whenever I could, I was to walk from town to town, sending my luggage by a carrier. I was to avoid inns, and to refuse no invitations to dinner, tea, or supper, when they came in my way: and if I was at any time under an absolute necessity of being at an inn, I was to contrive to make supper serve for dinner, together with divers other economical suggestions. In this way, I was to make a journey of about six weeks, visiting many towns, and taking the great metropolis in my way.

When I made this journey, I little thought the time would ever come that I should write my own memoirs; for if I had anticipated this work, I should have taken with me a memorandum book, wherein to set down the particulars of my journey, together with an account of the reception that I experienced from the individuals to whom I made application for

assistance, towards liquidating our chapel debt. As it is, I can only write from recollection. I carried with me a book to enter names of contributors in, and on the first page of it was given an account of the circumstances which led to the building of the chapel, and the case was recommended to the attention of the religious public, by the signatures of several respectable ministers. Though there was not a word in the whole statement that could be positively declared a falsehood, yet the truth was stated in such an ingenious manner, that the persons who read that statement had a very different idea of the nature of the concern, from what the reader of these pages has.

This begging excursion was any thing but pleasant; I wanted that confidence, and that persevering importunity which are so necessary to render supplication successful. I had to endure many rebuffs, and to undergo many insolent and insulting speeches, which I received with a great degree of meekness. But, gentle and good reader, I would not have you here imagine that I am making a pharisaic boast of my meekness, arrogating to myself an undue praise; for the truth is, that even at that time, I could not but see that in the building of the chapel, and in the separation from the original

congregation, there had been too much of worldly spirit, and there had mingled in the whole business too much of improper feeling; when, therefore, I was told, as I frequently was, that it was a pity to build chapels without the means of paying for them, I felt that there was much justice in the remark.

In the two or three towns which I first visited, I was so very unsuccessful in my applications, that I began most seriously to fear that I should not pick up money enough for my own expenses, and that I should be forced to beg my way home again. I was compelled to be very economical indeed in my expenditure. Here and there, however, I did at length meet with some liberal souls, who contributed of their abundance; but there was an admonition accompanying every donation, so that I felt a kind of pang at every addition to my fund. From some individuals I experienced almost as much rudeness as if I had been begging on my own account, and in some instances, I endured a greater degree of painful feeling, when a small donation was given to me with the assurance, that hard necessity prevented the donor from being more generous. On coming into any town, I generally introduced myself, in the first instance, to the minister, stating my

case to him, and requesting his interference and influence with his flock; but I found in most places that the minister looked rather coldly upon me, as if he thought that I was come to take away those superfluous pence from the liberality of his congregation, which he thought they could make a better use of at home. In some instances, however, the ministers themselves contributed, though very few could afford it. I must confess that, when I heard some persons complain of the expensiveness of dissent, I could not help thinking that they held their religion very cheap, and of very little worth, considering the value which their forefathers had placed upon it in the days of persecution, when they thought it more valuable than life, and liberty, and all their worldly goods.

After an absence of six weeks, I returned home, having collected seventy-four pounds six shillings, from which I had deducted only six pounds six shillings for my own travelling expenses. I expected to receive great applause for my economy; instead of which I was rather blamed that I had not kept a most exact account of the manner in which I had spent the money. Our chapel was now more than half paid for, and it had not been built much above

twelve months; therefore we had reason to be pleased with our good success. But as yet there was no fruit redounding to my account; there was no symptom of any increase of my salary; but there were many lamentations about the difficulty of keeping it up; and I was reminded, that if I wished to increase my salary I must exert myself to increase the congregation by my own eloquence. Alas! I did exert myself very much indeed. I gave all my time, all my thoughts to the duties of my situation; but I felt that the insinuation of the people at the chapel in the city of London was correct, that I did not possess the first talents in the market.

I have often heard it remarked, that we do not know how much we can do till we try; but there is another remark, which I think equally important, and that is, that we do not know how little we can do till we try. While we are idly dreaming about our mental powers, and nursing our vanity with shadowy reveries, we fancy that we are capable of any depths of thought or any heights of imagination; every dreaming poet is a possible Milton or Shakspeare; every dreaming orator is a possible Cicero or Demosthenes; but when circumstances compel a man to put forth his utmost

strength, then he feels how feeble he is. This reflection was painfully forced upon me when I was exhorted to rouse myself to greater energy in order to attract a congregation.

While I was in the town of X—, I had lived but an indolent kind of life, having no regularity of employment, and no systematic arrangement of the hours of the day, nor had I any particular line of study. I used to spend the greater part of my time in gossipping with the people of the congregation, and as I found myself rather better informed than they were on the subject of book learning, I fancied myself a scholar; and as I did not take all the pains that I possibly could, either with the composition or the delivery of my sermons, I fancied that I was capable of anything, if I should choose to exert myself; but when I came to the town of Y—, and was under the necessity of toiling hard in order to maintain myself and my position, I felt the difference. In the town of Y—, I soon preached myself out. I had soon exhausted my stock of showy common-places. I could not easily pick up fresh materials; and when I was conscious, as I frequently was, that I had nothing to say worth hearing, I had not the face to speak boldly and forcibly, so I made my flat common-

places fall flatter still by a cowardly feebleness of utterance. I have known some preachers spout forth with mighty energy and pomp of manner, the veriest nothings that the human tongue can utter, just as if they were delivering new, forcible, and original truths, splendidly and pointedly expressed. I could not do this; I wished that I could; I thought that I would try, but my heart failed me. Indeed it is no easy matter to think profoundly, or to speak eloquently and glibly when the mind is ill at ease.

I had now been upwards of five years engaged in the work of the ministry, and was seven-and-twenty years of age, and I felt that time was rapidly moving onwards, and that as yet I had made but little use of it. I began to be more and more dissatisfied with myself, and in general to feel that disappointment of heart which is the almost peculiar and inseparable lot of those whose profession leaves them much leisure for day-dreams, and places their time at their own disposal. I was in low spirits, and thought that the world had not used me well, when perhaps the truth was that I had not used the world well. I had miscalculated my powers, and misapprehended my position. More months and weeks passed away, and our

chapel was suspected to be a failure, and in a short time it was proved to be so.

The minister from whom my congregation had seceded was taken ill and died. I felt my heart beat at that event; I was sorry to lose a valuable acquaintance, but there had been some talk some time ago of the two congregations uniting again, if a minister could be found equally acceptable to both parties; and it had been more than hinted that I was likely to be the favored person. This would have been a fortunate movement indeed for me, but many untoward circumstances prevented it. These I will endeavour to relate according to the best of my recollection.

It must be borne in mind, that the town of Y—, though a large town, and in some measure a manufacturing town, was yet a very genteel place, and in the congregation from which mine was a secession there were several genteel persons, that is to say, lawyers and apothecaries; whereas in my congregation there were none genteeler than shopkeepers; so that my original want of gentility had been by no means remedied by an intercourse with them. Indeed, during the whole time that I resided in the town of Y—, I never once dined at a table where silver forks were used; I had once some

thoughts of buying a plated one for myself in order to practise with alone, but I feared lest any of my congregation should find it out, and thus bring against me a charge of pride, luxury, and extravagance; for quite as grave charges have been brought against dissenting ministers on grounds quite as trivial, when their congregations have been desirous of getting rid of them.

Furthermore, there was another objection to me, in the fact that in the old congregation there was a person who had a relative in the ministry, settled in a distant part of the kingdom, but having a salary quite small enough to induce him to listen to a call from one considerably larger. *Vox auri vox Dei.* This minister happened just at this juncture to be on a visit to his relative at Y—, and as the pulpit was vacant, very kindly favoured the congregation with his services, and was unanimously declared to be a very nice man. Some of my congregation also went to hear him, and they also said that he was a nice man. I was very nice once,—but a dissenting minister's niceness does not last long.

There was presently some talking, and whispering, and consulting among my congregation, at which I was not a little disturbed. I guessed

indeed what was the matter, and that the nice man would soon unite the two congregations, and leave me nothing but a nice new chapel only half paid for, and full of nothing but empty pews. It then occurred to me that the chapel which this nice man would leave might suit me, especially if my congregation should go back to their former place of worship, as they most likely would. Already several individuals had declared that intention, and therefore the burden would be greater on those who might remain. It was this that occasioned the talking and whispering, and consulting above mentioned. I was now reduced to something of difficulty, and knew not how to proceed. I certainly felt it to be an imperious duty to take care of myself, and yet I did not think it quite right to desert the congregation which had built me a new chapel, though I could not help wishing that they had made a better use of their money, especially as they seemed to have so little to spare. Then, again, I had to consider that it would not do for me, hastily to renounce my present situation till I was made somewhat sure of another; and I did not know how I could make sure of the situation likely to be vacant, unless I should go and make a personal visit, and give the people an opportunity of form-

ing some judgment of my abilities. I was therefore under the necessity of proceeding warily. I first of all made acquaintance with this nice man who was so great a favourite at Y—; and to him I candidly stated what were my fears and apprehensions as to my own congregation, and what were my hopes and desires with respect to his congregation in case of his leaving it, as it seemed probable that he would. This gentleman behaved very kindly and courteously to me, and offered to give every facility in his power towards forming an acquaintance with the people whom he was likely to leave.

While I was meditating these things in my own mind, and at my own lodgings, I received a visit from the principal person of my congregation. He was a linen-draper of very good repute, and though not living in much splendour, yet was considered a man of fair property. For a religious man, he was very much a man of the world, so far, that is, as regards the dexterous management of business and rendering it beneficial to himself; he was by no means a man of pleasure, for he avoided all such foolish waste of money and time. He was not a man of education, but of a great deal of reading, and he possessed much natural shrewdness and acuteness. In his politics he was an ultra-

liberal, or a decided republican; he professed a something of respect for gradations of rank and subordination; but so long as all were subordinate to him, he cared very little for any other subordination. He had been the whole manager of the secession, and so long as it gave him power and superiority, he regarded the expense as a matter of very little consequence. But after the building of the new chapel, the increase of expense rather more than kept pace with the increase of power and ascendancy; and now at length, seeing that he was likely soon to have an Atlantean weight on his own shoulders, he was desirous of relieving himself from the pressure, and for that purpose was his visit to me. I must do him the justice to say that he was greatly considerate of me; inasmuch as he had been mainly instrumental in bringing me to the town of Y—, he thought himself under a kind of obligation to keep me there, or to help me to something else to retire upon. And now he called upon me to say that he was very sorry that things had taken such a turn, and that I had not been able to get and keep together a congregation likely to be permanent. I also expressed my regret, and with my accustomed candour, acknowledged that it was very probably my own fault.

This acknowledgment seemed to be a relief to him, and he entered into the spirit of it with great cordiality. Then he began to express his great concern for me, and to pity me very much, and to tell me that my talents deserved a better fate ;—it is very pleasant to hear one's talents praised and talked about, especially if one has a doubt about possessing any worth talking about. He said that he wished he could be of any service to me, and that he thought my talents could never meet an adequate reward in the town of Y—, and that if I felt disposed to change my residence, he would try and get me favourably introduced to the people of the town of Z—, where there would in all probability soon be a vacancy. In a word, then, the new chapel was a manifest superfluity, and the secession from the old place was altogether a piece of gratuitous schism.

CHAPTER VII.

HITHERTO I had been greatly and seriously disappointed in my professional expectations. I knew, as well as any body could tell me, that there ought not to be in the minds of persons assuming so sacred an office feelings of covetousness, or a desire after worldly pelf or profit; I also knew that the highest and most profitable situations which the dissenters have to bestow in the way of the ministry amount to no great matter, and that the average of them are but a bare and scanty pittance. But then I thought, judging from the feeling which our family at home entertained towards the pastor on whose ministrations they attended, that there was, for the most part, a sentiment of respect for a minister; and that if the salary was small, it was at least given freely and ungrudgingly; for if people will not have the pastors and the worship which the state provides them, but will

have forms of their own devising, and ministers of their own choosing, and if they will dictate to these ministers all that they shall say in the pulpit, and all that they shall do out of it, surely they ought not to grudge them payment. I thought that the education which the dissenting minister receives, if he be at all regularly educated, was at least to give him an intellectual equality, if not something of a superiority to his flock; instead of this, I had found in every place where I had officiated, that I was exposed to criticisms and animadversions of the most mortifying and humiliating kind, from persons totally incompetent to form a judgment of the simplest productions of taste or reflection. I never thought such matters worth recording; but if I had only set down in writing one tithe of the criticisms to which I have been subjected, and the quality, condition, and attainments of the critics, and the manner in which these said criticisms have been offered to me, I should undoubtedly move the laughter of persons unacquainted with the life of a dissenting minister in a small way. But I must acknowledge that it was in a great measure my own fault. I suffered myself, in the first instance, to be too much gratified in hearing praises of my performances from persons totally incompetent to

judge; and after the example of too many of my brethren, I regarded public religious services too much in the light of performances. Indeed, the utter and excessive familiarity which a dissenting minister in a country-town is expected to keep up with all his congregation, under pain of their high displeasure, renders this impertinence and stupidity of criticism almost unavoidable.

Concerning the town of Y—, which by the movements above stated, I was under the necessity of leaving, I need say no more than that the new chapel, built as they said for me, did not answer; that the congregation went back to the old place, and sold the meeting-house for as much as it would fetch.

From Y— I removed to Z—, having my hopes by much experience sobered down to a far more rational temperament than they had hitherto attained. At my first introduction to Z—, as a candidate for the vacant chapel, I certainly may be said to have had fair play. I had been till then a total stranger to all and each of the congregation, and they had none of them any prejudices at all on the subject either for or against me. I of course preached my best sermons, and put on my best behaviour. In the pulpit I displayed my theological erudi-

tion, in conversation I made known my general attainments. I talked very learnedly of all those intellectual matters which engaged the interest and attention of the public mind at the time, and took every occasion to utter the wise, profound, or ingenious thoughts which had their origin in the working of my own mind. I made myself, in fact, agreeable and acceptable; so that, after spending a few months on liking, I was unanimously chosen to fill the vacant pulpit.

The town of Z— is a small town, and the congregation which chose me as its pastor was also a small congregation. I perceived at the first nothing very remarkable in the elements which composed it, nothing at all threatening the interruption of my peace of mind, nothing tending to explosion, division, or decay. In the Gazetteer, Z— is called a market-town; and there was in, or about the middle of it, an open space of no very describable shape, wherein was a pump and a pair of stocks; on Saturdays there were also divers butchers' stalls therein erected, together with accommodations for those who sold butter and eggs, and ducks, and such like matters; about eight or ten farmers also, from the immediate neighbourhood, came on the same day, and offered their wheat, beans,

peas, and barley, to the two or three corn-factors who lived in the town. Z— was also a very genteel town, though fortunately for me none of the genteel people belonged to my congregation. I have no particular dislike to genteel people, only in the course of my life I have experienced so many annoyances from a want of gentility, and have heard so much wearisome talk about gentility, that I am rather tired of the thing.

The principal person in my new congregation was a corn-factor, a very substantial man in more senses than one, being at once opulent and corpulent. He was very much a man of business, and was, I think, somewhat proud of the dexterity and success with which he conducted business. On Saturday I have seen him in the market place talking with the farmers, and his whole countenance has been lighted up with that peculiar mercantile intelligence which so distinguishes the knowing from the unknowing. He had his whole heart, except on Sundays, immersed in corn and cash; he had the acutest and quickest eye I ever saw; and though he did make his business an especial instrument of making money, yet he seemed also to love it for its own sake; he seemed to buy and sell *con amore*, as though

there were a peculiar pleasure in buying and selling, independent of any profit connected therewith. Till I saw this gentleman, I used to imagine that commercial pursuits had no other interest, than as they were the means of making money; I could not believe that any man could like business for its own sake. I could easily suppose that intellectual pursuits had a pleasure in themselves, independent of the profit that might be attached to them; and so indeed they had need, for they are not very profitable; but I was astonished to find that any man could take an absolute pleasure in what I called the sordid pursuits of commerce. I presently found that there was one text in the New Testament which I must not use to my new congregation, and that text was, "Love not the world, neither the things of the world;"—for this worthy corn-factor did love the world, and the things of the world, most cordially, with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his strength.

This part of my narrative brings to my recollection a pleasant, and yet somewhat painful piece of humour, perpetrated by a dissenting minister of my acquaintance; and as this gentleman is not now living to have his remarks animadverted upon, or to suffer any in-

convenience by the detection of them, I shall repeat them according to the best of my ability. Most of my readers have either read or heard of Dean Swift's Directions to Servants; now this dissenting minister to whom I allude, composed, but never published, a treatise called Directions to Dissenting Ministers. Amongst many other matters he states, how important it is that a minister should enjoy the good will and good opinion of his congregation; and then he gives a whole long chapter, which he entitles, "How to gain the good will of a dissenting congregation."

I do not pretend to quote his words, but I remember the substance very well. He begins by saying that a dissenting minister ought to consider himself as placed over a congregation, in order to furnish them with a pleasant amusement on Sundays, and to make the gospel so entertaining, that the people may not fall asleep under the preaching of it. For this purpose he must never contradict any of their opinions, nor oppose any of their humours or caprices, for nobody likes opposition or contradiction. Then he goes on to say, that it is for this purpose of the greatest moment, that the minister should know what are the opinions of the influential or subscribing part of his con-

gregation on the doctrines of the gospel, and if he finds them tolerably unanimous on the subject, then he cannot do better than preach often on those topics, and use all his ingenuity to prove those points which nobody denies. He says that he has often observed, that his own congregation never looked in such a decided good humour, as when he was proving by irrefragable arguments, all that they assented to without proof; for it is so easy, he adds, to find arguments to convince those who believe, and on the other hand it is so difficult to find arguments to convince those who do not. Then he says that people are never tired of hearing arguments which convince them, and that people never like to be convinced of what they don't like to believe. I am sure in that he is very right. I know it by my own experience. Arguing *à priori*, as the saying is, one might suppose that the great use of argument is to bring conviction; no such thing; but the great use of argument is to please those that are convinced.

Again, this director says, that it is also highly necessary to be acquainted with the various sins and follies of one's congregation, that one may not preach against them too roughly. He then very pleasantly says that a small congre-

gation is many respects highly convenient, and attended with many accommodations; but it is inconvenient, for want of a sufficient number of specimens of the various vices; and he explains this by adding, that if you have only one drunkard, one glutton, one covetous person, one unchaste person, one backbiter, and so on, in your congregation, you cannot preach against any of these vices, without exposing yourself to the heavy charge of personality. But if you have in your congregation two persons having the same vice, and if these two persons, as is sometimes the case, are not on very good terms with each other, then you may safely preach against the said vice, for neither of them will apply the remarks to himself, but each will apply them to his neighbour, and both will be gratified with them.

Moreover, he says, that if you cannot but for shame preach against any particular vices, then you must take an especial care to make a sort of back door for each individual to creep out at. For instance, when you preach against covetousness and a worldly spirit, you may say that your text is to be taken with some limitations, and that it does not mean to reprove a proper and suitable attention to that provision which it

is the duty of every individual to make for his family.

Or if, again, there should be in your congregation a waspish and litigious kind of person, and you should have occasion to preach on the doctrine of forgiveness, and the duty of mutual forbearance, you can easily say that this forbearance is not expected to extend to those transgressions which the laws of our country have seen fit to visit with punishment, and that it is sometimes necessary to exhibit a proper spirit, not for our own sakes, but for the sake of society and the world at large.

The safest way of all, he says, is not to preach against any sins of which any of your congregation may be guilty; but if you have sufficient ingenuity to manage to preach against sin without disturbing the sinner, it is so much the better, for you thereby get the reputation of being a faithful preacher. "For a faithful preacher," says he, "is one who preaches in favour of my opinions, and against everybody's sins but mine."

These and many other matters are dwelt upon in the treatise far more elaborately, and with far more humour, than I have either space or ability to imitate. I am sure that when I read the treatise in manuscript, I had little idea

that I should find by experience so much real truth in the satire; but I am more and more convinced, every day of my life, that the situation in which a dissenting minister is placed, is one of essential and hopeless servility. He may disguise that servility in various ways, and by several contrivances, but he can never get rid of it; he must be directed by his congregation, and must seek to please men, ay, and women too; for men, women, and children will be his critics, carping at and objecting to him, for everything that does not exactly hit their fancy or suit their humour, and he must be subservient to them in all things, in politics, in theology, in manners, dress, and amusements.

In a pamphlet recently published, entitled, "Ecclesiastical Establishments not inconsistent with Christianity, &c., by William Hull," the following illustrative passage occurs. The writer, I believe, is a dissenting minister. "Dependent for his election to office on the suffrages of persons who are proud of a power which they are seldom qualified to exercise with wisdom; dependent for his daily bread on the voluntary contributions of those, who, while they are accustomed to sit in judgment on the preacher, boast that they can, at any time, cashier and reject the man of their choice; de-

pendent for a favourable reception of his public services on a series of private attentions, which, under the imposing name of pastoral visits, are for the most part only the sacrifice of time to frivolous gossip and idle calls; the pastor of an Independent church is of all men the *most dependent;* and, therefore, to maintain his standing with a plebeian constituency, must be of all men the most servile. This servility is inculcated by the dignitaries of dissent under the abused name of Christian humility; and to cut and shuffle and creep, is perversely denominated becoming 'all things to all men.' But he has his revenge; he stoops to conquer. He maintains his ascendancy by arts of fanaticism, or by cherishing the passions of sectarian bigotry and hate, and surrounds himself finally with the factitious dignity, and questionable influence of a partizan."

When I first came to reside at the small town which I have designated by the name of Z—, I thought that I had before me a life of comparative ease and quiet, and that I had now arrived at a haven of peace. My salary was one hundred and thirty pounds a-year, which, though not quite so great as that to which I had aspired at my first outset in the ministerial profession, was much greater than

any to which I had been hitherto accustomed, so that I felt myself to be in a state of comparative opulence. Every thing about me also seemed to have an aspect of peace and quietness, and I set myself down to enjoy my existence. As I had with me a tolerably large stock of sermons on all sorts of subjects, I was not under any especial necessity to study very hard, or to confine myself much at home; so I had opportunity very freely and abundantly to bestow myself in visiting my congregation. I was almost always calling in upon one or another, and I was always a welcome visitor. I endeavoured also, as well as I could, to equalize my attentions, in order that I might not excite any jealousy by paying more attention to one than to another.

By degrees, and by very rapid degrees too, I became familiar with them all, quite familiar with them; I was taken into their confidence, and they were taken into mine, and we thought that we loved one another most heartily. They used to tell me of their troubles and cares, and loves and hatreds, and to fill me with all manner of small talk, and this sort of thing pleased me rather better than the more serious labours of close study; in truth, I may say that I had no inclination or appetite for study, inasmuch

as the foundation laid at the dissenting college was not large enough whereon to build any effectual or valuable superstructure.

Furthermore, I said to myself, Why should I study books when I have before me so much more valuable study in the study of human nature? Presently, however, I found out that in this study I had hit upon a very unpleasant, though not uncommon curiosity in humanity, and that was a family quarrel. At this time I was not so very young, and I thought that I had seen enough of life to learn, from what I had seen, a lesson of caution and circumspection; so I fully, and as I thought, wisely determined to have no part whatever in the said quarrel. It was impossible, however, for me to avoid listening to the lamentable and heart-stirring tales of sad and cruel wrongs which were poured into my listening ear. I listened and I begged to be spared giving any opinion on the subject, for I should be very reluctant, I observed, to give offence to any one of my congregation. As I had listened to the one party, I could not refuse to listen to the other; so I listened to the other, and when I had heard them both I was puzzled, very grievously puzzled indeed, and my puzzle was to determine which was the greater fool of the two.

This is rather strong language, I must allow; but it requires strong language to express strong feelings; yet I should be much at a loss to explain in any intelligible language what was the nature, cause, sum and substance of this said sad disagreement.

The parties concerned were two of the fair sex; they were sisters; the one was the wife of my opulent and corpulent friend the corn-factor, and the other was the widow of a very respectable grocer and tea-dealer. They were both members of my chapel, and both used to attend very regularly; but they were both of them so highly conscientious, that they would never both at the same time partake of the Lord's Supper. I had a great deal of trouble with them; indeed, more than any one would readily believe, or could easily imagine. In the first instance, as soon as I was so far in their confidence as to know of the very existence of their disagreement, from that very hour I could never enter the house of either party without having the subject, not merely alluded to, but made the whole topic of conversation all the time that I staid. The first salutation was scarcely over before I was asked, "Did you see Mrs. —— at chapel on Sunday?" "Did you observe what a look she gave me as

we were going out?" "Did you see what a frightful bonnet she had on?" "Did you notice how unbecoming her new silk gown looked?" To a thousand such questions from both parties I had to listen with exemplary patience, and to make to them something of a reply, trembling all the while lest my reply should be misinterpreted and misrepresented to the other. It was in vain for me to protest that I was not much in the habit of looking about me from the pulpit; it was in vain for me to declare that I was no judge of the pattern of bonnets, or the cut of silk gowns; for it was insisted on without mercy, that it was absolutely impossible that a gentleman of my superior understanding and classical attainments should not be able to discriminate between a well-made and an ill-made bonnet.

Another great difficulty I had, which indeed amounted to an impossibility, and that was to ascertain what was the cause of the disagreement; but the very attempt to find it out was as hopeless and laborious a task as attempting to discover the source of the Niger. Indeed, my real opinion is, that they had been so long at enmity that they themselves had actually forgotten the cause of the alienation. As a good physician, before he attempts to cure a

complaint, endeavours to assure himself what the complaint really is, so did I endeavour to ascertain what the disagreement was, in order to set it to rights. My endeavours were fruitless. But if I had difficulty to discover which of the two was in the right, it was easy enough to see that both were in the wrong; for when I suggested the probability, and offered my mediation for the purpose of effecting a reconciliation, they did both severally, but with equal violence, exclaim against the possibility of such a thing, throwing of course all the blame the one upon the other, and *vice versa.*

Once indeed I was so far moved to vindicate the honour of my office, as to throw out a pretty broad hint, that as a Christian minister it would be my duty to request that the parties would both abstain from coming to the Lord's table, till a better spirit existed between them. But the opulent and corpulent corn-factor hearing of this, immediately called upon me, full of bustle and of importance, declaring that he would never submit to such an indignity as having his wife excommunicated, but that I might excommunicate the grocer's widow as soon as I pleased. It was quite out of the question that I should denounce the censures of the church on one party, and pass by the

other unnoticed and unreproved: so that I knew not what to do; for I could not form any idea whatever, as to who began the hostility, and I dare say that they scarcely knew themselves. Unfortunately also for the work of discipline, these were among the most liberal contributors to the chapel, so that it would have been madness to have alienated them. I have sometimes been tempted almost to laugh aloud at the ludicrous and absurd complaints of both parties. If one passed by the house of the other without turning round her head to look upon her sister's dwelling, then I heard a full-mouthed declamation on the obstinacy and haughtiness of the passer by; but if, on the other hand, the head was turned round, then it was sure to have been with a sneer, or a frown, or a laugh, or a smile of contempt, or with a studied and insolent placidity ten thousand times more galling than all sorts of frowns, scowls, sneers, or haughty looks. And then I was expected to sympathise most eloquently and indignantly with all these various abominations, insults, and indignities; but I could not for my life; my constitution is not a very indignant one at best, and it has rather suited my circumstances and condition, to cultivate a habit of placidity, in preference to that pro-

vocability, in which some of the species exult.

The fact is, I have no doubt that these two ladies had a peculiar *penchant* for quarrelling; they could not be happy without it; they relished the pathos of complaining of the bitter insults to which they were subjected; they did not care who insulted them, provided that they had the pleasure of complaining of the cruel ill-treatment that they experienced. Very likely they would have made it up with one another, provided I could have found them two other persons who would have taken such pains to quarrel with them, as they did with one another; but that I am sure I could not have done, for there were not two more such in the whole town.

CHAPTER VIII.

I AM now arrived at a most important epoch in my history, the most important, perhaps, in a minister's life. Being arrived at years of discretion, as I thought, for I was full thirty, I ventured to take the liberty to fall in love, and to marry. This I found was taking a very great liberty indeed, but I am sure I did not think any harm. I did not marry a portionless damsel, as one of my brethren did, who, in consequence of it, found his salary gradually decrease, as a hint that he might take himself and his poverty elsewhere;—nor did I marry one out of any other sect than my own. My sin was, that I chose a wife for myself. I will not say, because I do not think, that there were any young or middle-aged ladies in my flock, who were desirous of having me; but the sin was, that I chose for myself without consulting

my flock. Now by this I say I gave offence. I did not fall into any downright disagreement, or come to anything like absolute affront; they were all very civil to the bride, and affected to like her very much, but they all made various animadversions and remarks of a not very complimentary nature; and these remarks were all carefully picked up, and brought to me for my own special amusement; they were all told to me in perfect confidence, and a particular injunction was given to me by the narrator, praying that I would not let them give me a moment's uneasiness on any account whatever;—they did not indeed give much uneasiness, but they would have given me less, if I had never been told of them.

I had never said a word to my wife about the deadly feud which subsisted between the corn-factor's wife and the grocer's widow. I am almost afraid that I acted disingenuously in this matter, having a kind of instinctive fear that I might not be able to persuade her to accept my hand under such circumstances. Great indeed was her consternation and annoyance, when she found what was the state of affairs in my congregation; and the manner in which she made the discovery was somewhat curious. My wife had been making a call

alone one morning on the corn-factor's wife, and on her return home, she expressed herself to me in terms of almost horror, at the enormous wickedness of the grocer's widow, as she had learned the story from the corn-factor's wife. I smiled at the information, and recommended her to make an early call on the grocer's widow; she did so accordingly, and heard exactly the same account from her of the corn-factor's wife, as she had heard from the corn-factor's wife of the grocer's widow.

A man often feels reluctant to speak highly of his own wisdom, however highly he may think of it, and on whatever good foundation his opinion of it may be built; but no man hesitates to commend the wisdom of his wife, when he has cause and reason so to do. In the present instance I certainly must commend the wisdom of my wife, who so managed in this tremendous feud between the grocer's widow and the corn-factor's wife, that for nearly six weeks she offended neither one party nor the other: but at length, in order, I suppose, to give some little zest and variety to their quarrel, they both of them, almost simultaneously, took it into their heads to be offended at something that my wife had either said, thought, or done, or at something she

might have said if she had thought of it, or at something which she did not say, because she did not think of it, or at something that they thought she might not have said: in fact, their susceptibility of offence was so exquisitely nice, that it is no easy matter to define it. Be it as it may; one of those dear good creatures who run about from house to house, keeping up a constant communication of gossip, and a transfer of whispers from one to another, brought to our house one fine morning the awful intelligence that, owing to some misunderstanding which nobody could understand, the corn-factor's wife and the grocer's widow had both declared that they would never speak to my wife again. This news came, as it was intended to come, as a thunderbolt. I was struck dumb, but my wife laughed. Now as to the mere fact of these people speaking or not speaking to my wife, the matter did not signify a straw; it would have been quite as well if they had never spoken at all, either to her or to anybody else; but when a serious feud breaks out in a nice little snug country congregation of dissenters, it is like a fire in a house built with party walls; it does not spread very far, but it rages with tremendous fury as far as it does extend.

There was nothing that my wife hated so heartily as nonsense, and if any one was disposed to play the fool, she would let them play it alone, and would not take any second part with them. Away therefore she immediately goes to the high contending parties, and with the utmost coolness tells them what she has heard, what is her authority, and asks them what is the cause of offence. At this right-forward mode of procedure, both are severally posed, and are at a loss what to say, and therefore presently back out and make an awkward kind of apology, saying that it was all a mistake. But, good reader, mark the consequences,—because my wife would not quarrel with them, they both hated her with a perfect hatred.

I am sorry to have to record such things; they are no honour to human nature, they puzzle the philosopher, they humble the Christian. That such persons as I have been describing above are not peculiar to dissent, I am well aware, and that their humour is not mainly or solely developed by dissent, I am also well aware; but their existence and their effervescence is far more annoying to a dissenting minister who is dependent on his flock, than they can possibly be to any other.

When I married and established myself in a home of my own, occupying a house instead of living in lodgings, I of course found it necessary to abate a little of the frequency and length of my gossipping calls. I found attractions at home; I had the company of one who wearied me not, of one who made a point of making my life pass pleasantly, and I felt very little inclination to leave her alone, and go to my old haunts of gossipping. When I first took up my abode in the town of Z—, I endeavoured to divide my attentions with a tolerable impartiality among all the congregation; but in spite of my teeth, as the saying is, there were several who engrossed rather more of my time and my talk than properly fell to their share. The reader may recollect that at the town of X—, I mentioned a very worthy couple, who had nothing to say for themselves; such people are always to be found, and though they form a pleasant contrast to voluble and ceaseless talkers, yet it is not easy to spend much time with them, nor appear to be highly delighted with their company. I had already, therefore, occasioned some jealousy by the partiality of my visits and attentions, and now, after my marriage, I occasioned some more jealousy, because I did not so often gossip with those with

whom I had been accustomed to gossip. My congregation, in fact, became jealous of my wife.

The dissenters, in general, have a great abhorrence of popery, except when they can make it the means of annoying the established church; but there is one piece of popery which they seem disposed to imitate, and that is, in forbidding their priests to marry. They do not directly attempt it, but they generally throw so many obstacles in the way, and make so much idle interference, that many dissenting congregations might as well expressly forbid their ministers to marry at all. I have known instances of persons of competent ability and character, who have been rejected in the competition for a vacant pulpit, because there has been something in the manners or style of the minister's wife not acceptable to the ruling party. All the world seem fond of interfering with, and finding fault with people's marriages, but there is no one with whose marriage strangers by blood so much interfere, as with the dissenting minister's.

And being on this topic, I would here generally observe, that a dissenting minister has to choose between these two evils: first, he may marry either out of his congregation, or one in his congregation not connected with the prin-

cipal people;—in either of these cases his wife is not very cordially received by the principal people: or secondly, he may marry one connected with the principal people, and then, as sure as fate, he is hen-pecked by all his wife's relations,—his house is open to their inspection, every dish upon his table is criticised by them, and he can scarcely drive a nail into the wall to hang his hat upon, without their permission.

I have said that after my marriage I was under the necessity of diminishing gossipping visits, but those of my flock who had been accustomed to my company were not pleased to lose it; and so because I could not find time to go to see them so frequently, they were kind enough to come and see me; and they were exceedingly kind and communicative, all of them telling us everything that everybody said about every thing. Moreover, as my wife was not a very old woman, it was taken for granted, that she was an ignorant and inexperienced creature, who must necessarily stand in need of, and be thankful for, all sorts of advice and direction on all sorts of subjects relative to house-keeping. The wife of my opulent and corpulent friend the corn-factor was a most notable woman, deeply versed in all the mys-

teries of the market, and all the arcana of cookery. Wisdom, it is said, is better than riches, and well it is so, for the wise are more ready to impart their wisdom than are the rich to impart their riches. This lady, notwithstanding that she hated my wife on account of her indisposition to quarrel, yet condescended to instruct her in the art of going to market, and to dictate to her what to buy, and how to cook it when bought.

I was annoyed at finding my house so little my own, and was not at all pleased at receiving so much instruction, and hearing so many remarks on the management of my establishment. It may suit the taste of some to be the object of universal notice, and a topic for all tongues to talk about; but I cannot say that this was ever or at all a part of my ambition; for notwithstanding the essential publicity of my profession, I loved retirement, and almost wished that I could preach anonymously. I was wearied at the interest which my flock was kindly pleased to take in all that concerned me.

There was also another topic of very great moment to many of my flock, especially the female part of it, and that was the style of my wife's dress; and some of my best and kindest friends of all were so good as to tell me all the

ugly and ill-natured remarks that were made on any particular cap, gown, bonnet, hat, shawl, ribbon, tippet, or pelisse, which my wife happened to wear. To this sort of thing, however, by degrees we became accustomed, and came at last to disregard.

My readers may remember that in my account of my residence in the town of X—, I have recorded the formation of an Unitarian chapel by transmutation of a Presbyterian chapel; I have now to record an attempt to raise an Unitarian congregation in the town of Z—, but the attempt was ultimately a failure. In the town of Z— there was no Presbyterian chapel to be used for the purpose, as there had been in the town of X—, and the number of persons in Z— at all approaching to the Unitarian faith, or want of faith, was so exceedingly small, that I absolutely was in amazement at the attempt. This event scarcely perhaps comes directly within the line of my history, yet being myself a dissenter, I am interested in all manner of dissenterisms; and as the matter occasioned some talk in my congregation, my attention of course was directed to it. I would not wilfully write anything unjust concerning this sect, which may contain some serious and pious persons, but for the most

part I have observed that they are not remarkable for seriousness, but rather for the reverse.

And now that I am on the subject, I know not why I may not by way of instructive digression say a few more words, which may give to the public a knowledge of what is more talked about than understood. In London there are many Unitarians, but they are scarcely seen, for they are not sufficiently numerous to make much of an impression, or to fill up any great space in the religious world, and their peculiar features are not very distinguishable. Amongst Unitarians, as well as amongst all other sects, there must be of course a great moral variety; therefore the remarks which I am about to make, must not be taken as applicable to every individual in the sect, but merely as generally descriptive. The most obvious feature in Unitarianism is, that its faith is rather negative than positive; and if any one ask what are the opinions of the Unitarians on religious topics, the truest and most compendious answer is, that they reject almost all the doctrines which the rest of the Christian world receive. They do indeed profess to acknowledge the divine authority of the New Testament, but as they do not admit the doc-

trine of the inspiration of the writers of the several books, they go very near to reduce the divine to a mere human authority. They talk of the evangelists and apostles writing as mere honest men and credible witnesses, according to the best of their judgment and ability; so that, after all, the Unitarian's divine authority of the New Testament does not amount to much more than the divine authority of Hume's History of England. They speak of Jesus Christ as an inspired teacher, but as for any idea of the blood of Christ cleansing from all sin, their explanation of it is such as to represent the blood of the apostles and martyrs equally efficacious for that purpose. Their first process in order to get rid of the texts obnoxious to their theory, is to call them interpolations, but where that cannot be very decently done, then they are called strong oriental figures; but if all that will not do, then, as the apostles were fallible men, it is possible that they might have been in error sometimes; and of course, they must have been wrong when they contradict the modern Unitarian theory. I have been frequently led by curiosity to hear their preachers, and I think I have not unfairly stated their peculiar theology and criticism.

Their congregations are not very numerous,

and their chapels are but thinly attended, except now and then in the case of some peculiarly eloquent preacher, and then the audience is got together rather to hear man's eloquence, than to attend upon the worship of God. Those of their sermons which I have heard are either meagre talkings upon some common-places of morals, or sophistical underminings of some doctrine of the gospel. They seem, generally speaking, to have but light ideas of sin, regarding rather its physical and temporal inconvenience, than its moral enormity or future consequences. The general effect of their preaching seems to be to produce a habit of scoffing at things sacred, and they frequently make a joke of those matters which, being above their comprehension, they think to be contrary to reason, though I question whether many of them know what reason is. The difference between Unitarianism and infidelity is so slight, that men pass from one to the other, without their neighbours being sensible of it. Considering how lightly for the most part, they regard religion, I almost wonder that they take so much pains to make proselytes; but they are always boasting of the increase of their numbers; their proselytes, however, are not made by converting the irreligious to religion,

but by bringing men over from one opinion to another. They boast of opening new chapels, but they say not a word of those that they shut up for want of hearers.

The formation of the Unitarian interest at Z—, was as complete a specimen of zeal without knowledge as I ever saw or heard of. There was a corn-merchant in the town, a man of good property, and altogether a man very fair to pass in the world. He was, for a man in business, very fond of reading, and he liked not a little the reputation of intellect; and thinking that he might grow wiser and wiser by reading, he read a very great deal, and being fond of argument and demonstration, he was always arguing against mystery, and what he called absurdity. He was professedly a dissenter, and used to subscribe to a dissenting chapel in the town, which he seldom attended.

About fourteen miles from Z—, there was a larger town, in which was a congregation of Unitarians, amounting in number to about seventy or eighty persons. This congregation had a new minister, a young man who had left the religion in which he had been brought up, and had become a convert to Unitarianism. In the violence of his newly awakened zeal, he had a fancy for converting all the world to his

opinions, but he could not make much progress in the town where he was settled. He preached with great fervour against the absurdities, as he called them, of the popular faith, but he made very little impression, and very little addition did he make to the number of his hearers. Understanding that in the town of Z—, there was a person suspected of an attachment to the Unitarian theory, this zealous young man soon made acquaintance with him, and succeeded in persuading him to use all his influence for the establishment of the Unitarian cause in the town. There were two or three more individuals who would very probably join the party, if the thing were once set on foot; and it was some gratification to the vanity of the worldly-minded man to be the founder of a sect, so that the corn-merchant listened to the persuasions of the zealot, and resolved to take the matter into serious consideration.

None but an Unitarian would think of starting a new congregation, having but one individual to begin with; and in truth it may be said that this corn-merchant was the only individual that was at all concerned with any degree of interest or feeling for the establishment of the new chapel. He had indeed a family of several sons and daughters growing up; he had

also several men in his employ, and he had some little influence over one or two cottagers, and some few small shop-keepers, who would follow him whithersoever he went, and would be his fellow worshippers, whether it were in an Unitarian chapel or a Mahommedan mosque.

This corn-merchant, and all his followers, could not muster up among them the means of building a chapel or paying a minister, nor indeed was so bold a step contemplated, at least, not at present, they said; for they were really sanguine enough at first starting, to imagine that they should make rapid progress in converting the inhabitants of the town, and in bringing them all over to the new doctrine.

In the first instance a room, or loft, or corn-chamber, or something of that kind, capable of containing about forty or fifty persons, was fitted up with benches and a pulpit; and the zealous young minister came over to Z—, to open the chapel in due form. Curiosity brought together more than fifty people, so that the place was inconveniently full, at which the young preacher was highly delighted, and he pointed out the absurdity of all the received doctrines of Christianity; and because some of the people *stared* with astonishment at the boldness of his

assertions, he thought that they listened with a profound and pleased attention. The fact is, that this young man was really a person of some genius and of a vivid imagination, but his literature was very scanty, and his powers of reasoning were altogether feeble and imperfect. He was of very agreeable manners, pleasant in conversation, and with those who knew no better, he might even pass for a scholar. His reading was altogether confined to Unitarian tracts and light literature, so that his mind had, comparatively speaking, no exercise; but he was eloquent, and very showy in his eloquence.

This opening of the Unitarian chapel occurred early in the summer, and the young gentleman engaged, just by way of beginning, to come over to Z— every other Sunday to give an evening lecture; and he recommended the corn-merchant himself to become a lay-preacher, and by the help of an Unitarian Liturgy, and some printed sermons, to keep the chapel open at other times.

This chapel was situated up a yard, or narrow passage, and therefore in order to give publicity to the thing, a painted board was placed over the entrance to the passage, directing strangers "To THE UNITARIAN CHAPEL." The town

was now inundated with Unitarian tracts, but very few people read them; for religious people avoided them, and irreligious people did not care about them.

The opening of the chapel was blazoned in one of the magazines of the sect as a wonderful achievement, and all the common-places were trumpeted forth, of a crowded and attentive auditory, of a spirit of free inquiry being kindled in the town of Z—, of the eagerness with which the people received the tracts, of the importance of the station as a centre from whence Unitarianism might diffuse its light into the surrounding villages. Knowing as I did all the real facts of the case, I could not but smile when I read the pompous advertisement.

As the winter came on, and travelling became not quite so pleasant as it had been in the summer, the zeal of the young minister began to cool; his visits to Z— were less frequent; he had gone through his whole list of objections to the doctrines of Christianity, and had nothing more wherewith to attract straggling hearers, and people of unsettled minds. The corn-merchant also began to grow tired of reading his Unitarian Liturgy and Blair's Sermons to the select few, and he also wanted the corn-

chamber for other purposes; so all on a sudden, one Saturday night, "*The Unitarian Chapel*" vanished, the board was removed from the entrance of the passage, and pulpit and benches made way for beans, barley and wheat. So much for free inquiry; and I never heard of any one who inquired or cared what had become of the concern. I don't think that their Magazine contained any account of what had become of the important station.

I have mentioned the above as one, but I have known or heard of many other such abortive attempts to establish Unitarian chapels. They can do nothing without the assistance of Presbyterian endowments, and very little with them. I am really astonished that the sect lasts so long as it does. It is thirty years ago since Robert Hall said of it, that it was "a headless trunk, bleeding at every pore;" but I suppose there will always exist some few singular and fantastical persons, who, not relishing the doctrines of the gospel, nor caring to be altogether without religion, will make profession of this Unitarianism. The sect has been at work now long enough to have converted half the kingdom, if it had possessed anything worth regard.

I have often been astonished at the impor-

tance which many clergymen of the established church have seemed to attach to Unitarians, preaching and writing against them with learning, sagacity, and zeal, as if the civil and religious institutions of the kingdom were in danger from them. I have no doubt that many of them would be glad to see the demolition of existing establishments, but their numbers are so absurdly small, that the established church is in no more danger from them than from the followers of Joanna Southcott; and the bond of union which holds them together, is not stronger than that which united the multitudes who occasionally filled the Rotunda, to listen to the discourses of the Reverend Robert Taylor.

CHAPTER IX.

THE bitter feud between the corn-factor's wife and the grocer's widow, which had threatened to destroy the peace of my flock, my wife and myself, gradually, though very slowly, abated; till at length, in the course of some few years, they consented to shake hands and make it up; though what they were making up, neither they themselves nor any one else could tell.

Reader, if you have been long in the world, I think you must have observed that the getting rid of one trouble is but the making way for another. I do not mention this murmuringly, or as insinuating a complaint against the goodness and wisdom of Him who rules our lives by his power, and holds our destiny in his hands; I am far from any such thought; but rather believe, that in our present imperfect state of being, such a trial and exercise of our graces is necessary for us, and beneficial to us.

Not long after the subsidence of the discord above named, and when I was congratulating myself that now all things were proceeding smoothly, I was assailed by the means of anonymous letters, an instrument of annoyance to which dissenting ministers are particularly subject; and perhaps also other persons may be so too, only we are always apt to magnify what concerns ourselves.

It is only necessary here to premise, that I had now been married seven years, and that my family consisted of three children; the eldest a girl about six years of age; the second a boy about four, and the youngest not more than twelve months. My wife also was living, and a very excellent wife she was, and I may add, is still.

I shall give these anonymous letters at full length, not altering the spelling, nor correcting the language; for there is a raciness and pungency in the original style which correction would only destroy. The first concerns the management of my family.

"Reverend Sir:

"It is with the most *sincerest pane* that I now take up my penn at this Time to *address* you on a matter of INFINIT momunt. I know

sir that your a man of grate learnin and much skollarship, and therfor p'raps my feeble penn ought not to *presuem* to approche you without the UTMOST REFERENCE. You may believe me when I tell you that there is no man whos preachin givs me more *instruction* nor yours, nevertheless, *most reverend sir*, I must tak the LIBBERTY to say with all due DIFFERENCE to your *superier* JUGEMENT to say, I say, that your *children* is not mannaged with all that proprietey which ought to be the *undoudted distinction* of evvery minister who profasses to teach his people *in the way* of truth, has *reveiled* in the Gosple of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins. Miss Angelina was FARST ASLEPE last Sunday afternoon almost all sermon time, and SNORED so as to be heered all over the meetin, and Master Tommy plays at marvels in the streets, if so be then as how you values the *immortle soles* of your children why dont you bring them up in the nurtur and ammunition of the Lord. So no more at present from your loving friend who shall be

"*Annonimus.*"

Scarcely had I recovered from the shock which the above letter gave me, when another was put in my hand coming from nobody

knows where, and bringing against me another heavy charge. It was as follows:—

"Reverend Sir:

"I have set under your ministry some yeres listening with greate delite to the tidings of the everlasting gosple, but am sorrey to say that of late I have not profitted as I yoused to do. I have ben a little afrade that the fault might be in myself, but on the closest examination I have come to the conclusion that you do not preach the gosple as you did once when you furst come among us. Our souls are parch up for want of the truth, the due of the word does not dissend upon us to fertilize our harts, and make them fruteful. A report is got abroad from some quarter or other, that you are half a sossinion at bottom, only you don't speak out. Your preching does not awaken the conscins as it out to do. unless these things is greatly altered you cant expect your people to profet by the worn preched.

"Your faithfl friend—*Alliquis.*"

My faithful friend "Alliquis," was just as acceptable a correspondent as my loving friend "Annonimus." I was at first annoyed, and then indignant, and had fully determined to

make a serious address from the pulpit to these anonymous libellers; but upon second thoughts I relinquished that intention, and resolved to keep the secret to myself, and put up with the affront; for I had heard of dissenting ministers putting themselves into a great passion on the receipt of anonymous letters, and declaiming from the pulpit in good set terms against the writers, so that they have thereby raised up against themselves a nest of hornets, that have not been easily suppressed again.

But my resolution availed me not, for whispers began to be circulated concerning me, and kind friends came to me with very long faces, and very long stories; all expressing their particular concern at these rumours, and all saying that it was a duty that I owed to myself to repel these insinuations, and boldly to meet these charges, and that I ought to challenge inquiry and provoke investigation. These people cared nothing about me or my reputation, but all they wanted was to get up a scene, and make a bustle all about a straw. There is nothing that a little dissenting congregation likes so dearly as a bit of moonshine, a secret committee to investigate certain indistinct charges brought against their dearly beloved pastor. I told my dear friends, over and over

again, that I heeded not the matter a single rush; that I did not care for a whole cart-load of anonymous letters; but they would not let me off so easily; they said that if I did not publicly meet, and decidedly refute the charges, I certainly pleaded guilty to them. To which I replied, that I must plead guilty to the charge of Miss Angelina going to sleep, and of Master Tommy playing at marbles; though I must be permitted very strongly to doubt the fact of Miss Angelina's snoring, a thing which I never recollected her to have been guilty of; and as for Tommy's gambling, I was pretty sure that it could not have been to any serious amount, for he never had any ready money in his possession, and I did not suppose that any one would take his acceptance. It was in vain that I attempted to laugh the matter off in that manner; for I only made the thing worse, I found, by this ill-timed levity. So I was forced to consent to have a committee formed to investigate the charges that had been brought against me.

My two anonymous letters were given up for investigation and inquiry, and I was questioned and requestioned, and sifted, and examined as to all my thoughts and my conversations; and there was as much fuss made about the matter

as though it had been the sitting of a court-martial on the most momentous affair imaginable. The result, however, was, that I was honourably acquitted; but the good people had had their humour, so they were happy. For a long time afterwards, however, my sermons were very diligently attended to, in order to detect, if possible, the leaven of heresy; and I cautioned Angelina against snoring, and gave Tommy to understand that the eyes of the world were upon him.

Though I had honourably passed through the ordeal of the dissenting inquisition, yet I found that I was not quite right in the estimation of the people of my flock. No one had any charge to bring against me; no one had any express complaint to make, but there was a feeling that something was wrong; there was a want of confidence and cordiality: there were plenty of professions, and there was much talk of the great esteem in which I was held; but all these professions, and all this talk, had no more meaning than the words "your humble servant," at the bottom of a letter. The fact really was, I had been too long with them; I was no longer able to keep up the excitement of novelty, or to stimulate the languid spirits by variety.

My growing family required much of my time and attention, therefore I kept myself much at home with them. I had known many melancholy instances of the children of dissenting ministers sadly falling off, and declining from the path of duty and the ways of religion, and I thought that much of this might be attributed to the want of parental society; therefore I kept myself much with my children; and I am truly grateful to find, now that they are grown up, they are, in the respectability and integrity of their character, a liberal and pleasing reward for the pains which I took with them in youth. No one dared expressly to charge me with paying too much attention to my family; but the whole of my flock did nearly the same thing, for they charged me with a serious neglect of my pastoral duty in not making more frequent visits to them. And yet if any were sick, or in trouble, I never failed to visit them, and to administer that consolation which the Christian pastor should present to those under his care. This, however, was not sufficient; I was expected to be every day popping in here and there and every where, for a bit of chat; and very likely all the chat would amount to nothing, or perhaps to worse than nothing,—to mere scandal *and small* talk.

People who do not live in small towns, where everybody knows everybody, and scarcely anybody has anything to do except on market days, can hardly form an idea of the utter nothingness of the talk of the generality of the inhabitants. They have no literature except of the county newspaper, and some of the inferior novels at a little circulating library; and they have no interest except in the movements, the sins, and the follies of one another. All their talk therefore is of personalities and localities. I had seen a great deal of this at the town of X—, and I saw a great deal more of it at the town of Z—, which was a considerably smaller town. My good people also, in their lamentation for the want of, what they called, my pastoral visits, but which were in reality mere gossipping calls, forgot the difference of my situation, and that a married man with a family could not have so many hours of leisure as a single young man. When I first went to Z—, I was a single man, and had a tolerably abundant stock of sermons, and the congregation was new to me and used to flatter me very much: now novelty and flattery are very pleasant things, especially to young people; so I was in the habit of making frequent and long calls upon the congregation. In truth I did

not well know what to do with my time, so I was strolling about from house to house almost every day, and almost all day long.

I would particularly and seriously advise young ministers when they are first settled with a congregation, not to be too ready to acquire habits of gossipping, for few things tend more decidedly to weaken the mind than lounging and small talk. When a man has acquired a habit of gossipping, and when it becomes a regular part of his occupation, as it often does with dissenting ministers, he will almost assuredly at times be drawn away into idle and foolish talk, which will one day or other be remembered and quoted against him. I felt myself, at the time of which I am now writing, to be much in the same situation, as was the minister whom I mentioned in the town of Y—, and from whose chapel that secession took place which built a chapel for me; but the discontented and the wearied ones of my flock were neither numerous nor wealthy enough to form a secession; so they remained and grumbled.

This was by no means a pleasant situation for me, but I could not easily find a remedy; indeed, I knew that the complaint was utterly incurable; weariness had taken possession of

them; they were longing for something new. I might have preached the best and soundest sermons that ever fell from mortal lips, and it would have all amounted to nothing; I believe they were scarcely aware of it themselves, but they were absolutely weary of the sight of my face and the very sound of my voice. If I had written a sermon and preached it, they would have cried out against it as a meagre and poor, and common place; but had any other person preached to them the same sermon from my pulpit, they would have listened to it with a most delighted and wrapt attention, and it would have been all that is good and beautiful. I am now an old man, and I can truly say, that I have seen dissenting congregations grow weary of three successions of preachers. Piety has nothing to do with it; for the truly pious of the congregation are for the most part quiet and uncomplaining, thinking more of the salvation of their souls than of the gratification of their taste.

I have thought much of this matter, and have observed it long with great patience and a close attention, and I find it to be an evil inseparable from dissent, and the natural consequence of the voluntary system. A minister goes to a congregation as a suppliant; he must

make himself agreeable to all, and undergo the criticisms of all; the very outset of his connexion with them places him in a humiliating attitude. When he first enters the pulpit as a candidate, the question naturally occurs to him, "Do I seek to please men?" and the answer as naturally occurs to him in the affirmative; for a while, perhaps, he may succeed—may be intensely popular; nay, be idolized—but it cannot last long, unless he has extraordinary talents, or great comparative wealth. Few men of wealth, however, are disposed to take up the work of the ministry among the dissenters; and as for extraordinary talents, it is merely an identical proposition to say that they are not common. But let a man's wealth or talents be what they may, a dissenting congregation can never forget that it has sat in judgment on its minister, and therefore can never look up with complete respect to one on whom it has looked down with the investigation of criticism. It often happens that a minister is engaged for six months, or even more, upon trial, and during the whole of that time he is listened to critically; and he preaches and prays with a view to criticism; and he is compelled to undergo a thousand impertinent hints, animadversions, and suggestions, to make himself all

things to all men; and at last it depends on the turn of a straw whether he be chosen or rejected. The sanctity and reverence of the ministerial character must greatly suffer by this system; and accordingly we find almost every where that a dissenting minister is but the tool of his flock; they are his instructor, and not he theirs. He must preach and pray in such fashion as may be most pleasing to them; he must be always of their opinion in all matters, religious, political, or otherwise.

Just as I was bringing these reminiscences to a conclusion, the following letter appeared in the Morning Chronicle of September 6, 1834, which tells the same tale that I have been telling of the impertinent interference of dissenting congregations with their ministers, and also of the weariness which the highest talents will sometimes superinduce on the lovers of novelty. Mr. Fox once enjoyed with his congregation a degree of popularity, almost amounting to idolatry, but now all this is changed.

To the Members of the Congregation assembling in South Place, Finsbury.

My Friends—In vacating the engagement between us by giving the six months' notice which your laws require, it was not my purpose to allow

that interval to elapse without some exposition of my motives and feelings on the occasion. There are reasons which induce me to postpone the fulfilment of this purpose; but it is desirable that at present I should submit a few words to you on our relative position.

My retirement is the result of no dissatisfaction with your conduct towards me, nor with the condition and prospects of the congregation as they were but a few weeks ago. In all these I then saw only reasons for gratitude and gratulation, and I supposed that we were unitedly cherishing the bright expectations expressed by your Committee, in the resolution passed by them on recording my resignation.

The approaching termination of our connection is an event not less astonishing to me than it must be to most of you. I thought myself firmly fixed in your respect and affection. I believed my conduct, public and private, to be not unworthy of them; nor did I meditate in either any deviation from the career which I had deliberately adopted, and consistently pursued.

All at once, however, I found myself subjected to an interference, by certain members of the congregation in my domestic concerns, which, as it originated in ignorance and delusion, could only terminate in confusion and mischief.

Whatever may have been the trials of my domestic life, through many long years—to whose, or to what fault (if fault there be) they are owing, are questions on which only continued and close intimacy can

justify any one in forming an opinion. Assuredly they are not fit subjects for argument before congregational authorities—still less for decision by a self-constituted and secret tribunal, however respectable its individual members. My self-appointed advisers having formed by *ex-parte* statements their opinion of what had been my former, and should be my future conduct, proceeded to strengthen their injunctions by recommending that, unless I consented to follow their suggestions, I should resign the office of your minister. Having reminded them of the responsibility they incurred, I tendered my resignation, on the ground of the dissatisfaction which they expressed, and sent a written demand of their allegations against me, and of the evidence in support of these allegations.

This resignation, dated July 12, was withheld by your treasurer, on his own responsibility, in the hope of inducing me to rescind it. I would have done so, if, on the one hand, I could have met with responsible accusers and specific charges, wherewith to grapple; or if, on the other, the attempted interference had been abandoned, the implied insinuations disavowed, and the advice to resign retracted, as formally as it had been tendered. Both were refused me; and I therefore had no alternative, especially as every day furnished some fresh instance of proceedings which tended to injure my character, and impair my usefulness.

Selections to an extent, and for purposes even yet unknown to me but by inference, were made from

the private correspondence treasured under my own roof; letters and extracts were shown, isolated from the occasions which called them forth, or the answers which they elicited; often, as I have reason to believe, with comments tending utterly to falsify their spirit; the accounts of my household expenditure, in an imperfect state, were subjected to analysis with the production of results that were rendered worse than simply fallacious by the inferences which were deduced; the evils, without the advantages, if such there would be, of a domestic inquisition gathered around me; while the evil was not confined to myself, but of the proverbial delicacy of female reputation, advantage was taken the most unjust and base.

As far as the confinement of illness, during which these proceedings commenced, has allowed me to ascertain the impressions made on individuals, I can only find, amid a chaos of impertinence and distortions, traces of two or three imputations, which I have met with a distinct and unequivocal denial, and for which no accuser has yet been bold enough to render himself responsible.

Symptoms have indeed of late been manifested of a disposition to charge me with holding principles which disqualify me, not only for the office of your minister, but also for any mode of social usefulness. A somewhat curious charge to originate amongst those, whose peculiar theology scarcely contains a doctrine, that is not denounced as emanating from the depravity of the heart.

Conversational report is ever liable to misrepresen-

tation and perversion, from which the press furnishes a happy exemption. What my opinions on the subjects in question really are, have been long before the public, and from the misconceptions and misstatements of private conversations, I appeal to the three articles in *The Monthly Repository* for January, March, and April, 1833, entitled "The Dissenting Marriage Question," a "Victim," and the "Letter to an Unitarian Minister," especially the last, as the most distinct and ample. For these statements of my views, I hold myself responsible; and I have always been anxious that none of that responsibility should be reflected upon others. It is by me, not therefore, necessarily by you, that they are deemed true, Christian, and important to the best interests of society; but if, after the lapse of so many months, during which I have received the strongest expressions of your approval that have distinguished my entire ministry, you could now suddenly be induced to make my holding them the pretext of congregational condemnation, I could scarcely regret being its object.

I have felt this communication to be due both to you and to myself. Before the now limited period of our connection expires, as soon as health and strength will permit, I shall attempt to pass before you, in a course of Sunday morning lectures, a rapid but comprehensive review of the great religious, moral, and social objects of that ministry which I have endeavoured faithfully to discharge.

August 15, 1834. W. J. FOX.

But to return. The restless and novelty-loving part of my congregation had been long tired of me, when there came a new minister to the other dissenting chapel in the town; and as there was no doctrinal point of difference between the two places, I found my congregation rapidly and seriously diminish. The new preacher was said to be a highly gifted man, and I therefore took it for granted that he was able to utter a vast number of words. On hearing him, I found this to be the case; indeed, I was beyond measure astonished at his fluency of speech, not that any one original thought was expressed by him, but he poured forth a copious vocabulary, which, being abundantly intermingled with scriptural extracts, gave the idea of a great biblical scholar. I presently saw that he was one with whom I could by no means compete, and therefore I sat myself down contented to go on as well as I could; though I was not by any means best pleased to be thus thrown into the back ground.

I had at this time been with my congregation at Z— about fifteen years, and was between forty and fifty years of age; and my knowledge both of books and of the world, far exceeded what it had been when I first came amongst that people; but that knowledge which

comes from reflection and observation will never make a dissenting minister popular; the people who rule the taste of the multitude are not partial to discourses which compel thought. I never was, and the reader of these pages may see, I never pretended to be a great scholar, or a man of great talent, and if I erred at all in assumption, it was rather in assuming too little than in claiming too much; and yet in the greenness of my untaught youth, I was much more highly thought of than in the intellectual vigour of my ripened manhood; therefore it is as clear as light that the great charm for the dissenting ear is novelty. Most of my sermons are written, and I have in my possession now, many that were composed in the commencement of my career, when I was highly popular, or at all events highly acceptable, and the showy emptiness of these sermons at once amuses and instructs me.

It will be supposed by many persons ignorant of dissent and dissenters, that if my congregation was much diminished by the popularity of the new preacher, I should be rid of all those to whom I was unacceptable, and that those who remained behind would be those only who were attached to me, and that I should have peace. Alas, no! they who remained behind were

rather attached to the place than to me. They seemed to consider themselves as belonging to the building, and they remained behind in hope of choosing a successor to me, when I should be tired of preaching to empty pews, and the growling remnant of a congregation. Still, however, there was an apparent civility towards me, an outward courtesy of demeanour. I did not know directly from any individual that he or she was dissatisfied with me and wished me away; but there was always found some kind, considerate friend or other, who would, as a particular favour, confide to me the particular secret, that such and such persons had been heard to say, that the congregation would be totally ruined, unless they could get rid of me. There was not a word of objection whispered against my moral or intellectual character; the whole, sole, and only sin that I had been guilty of, was, that they were tired of me. They were hankering after something new. They scarcely knew it themselves, but this was the whole cause of the uneasiness. Surely the Wesleyan Methodists act wisely in this matter; they shift their ministers about from place to place, never suffering them to reside more than three years in one place; thus the congregations are always stimulated with something new; so they keep

together and are content. Yet it is a serious and lamentable evil, that religion should be rendered subservient to the mere purpose of amusement, and that a preacher of the gospel should be regarded as a kind of stage-player.

Finding that matters were come to such a pass, that it would be absolutely necessary for me to depart, unless I would run the risk of having a hint given me, by the removal of the roof of the chapel, I began to revolve in my mind, by what means I might procure to myself another chapel. I had been settled now for so many years, and had grown so domesticated and attached to the town of Z—, that I felt a sensation of reluctance at the thought of leaving it. Moreover, I knew that I was not so young as I had been, and that this would be an insuperable objection against me, with many congregations. I knew of no vacancy to which I could direct my attention, and it occurred to me that I would write to the gentleman whose successor I was, and who, as the reader may remember, was settled at the town of Y—, having reunited the congregation, which had separated, and of one fragment of which I was at one time pastor. This gentleman I had not seen since I came to Z—, but I had heard of his fame by means of the magazines, for he was

a very popular man, and by means of using a great many words to express one idea, he made his ideas hold out a long while, and kept up a tolerable supply of novelty. The town of Y—, where this gentleman was fixed, was considerably larger than the town of Z—, and many of his congregation were among the chief people of the place; therefore he himself, as their minister, was a man of some importance in the town, and he was a public orator on public occasions; he was become, indeed, quite a great man in a small way.

I wrote accordingly to this gentleman, and explained to him that it would be very desirable for me to find another congregation, stating the reasons why I felt it imperative on me to move from Z—. I presently received an answer to my letter, and was astonished to find that so great and so popular a man was not quite at his ease. He, I found, had many annoyances and mortifications to endure, and was a victim to the voluntary system as well as myself. Indeed, in some respects, his situation was worse than mine, for his salary was larger, and therefore it was not so easy for him to find another equally good; his family also was larger than mine, and he was rather more advanced in life. Therefore, he was forced to put up with many indignities, and to labour with great application,

to maintain his position. He also possessed, I think, a very large share of vanity; for the gratification of which, he would undergo almost any degree of toil. His mind was in a state of constant activity and irritation; and though he appeared to the eye of the world a prosperous, and a highly esteemed man, yet I found, on farther acquaintance with him, that he had to undergo many annoyances from his flock, and especially from that part of it which had formerly been mine. The more aristocratic and lordly part of his congregation were whigs, but the plebeian part were radicals; and these latter were a great trouble to him, because they could not in all matters obtain his cordial co-operation; for indeed, he wished not to have anything to do with politics. On this, however, I will not enlarge; having mentioned this gentleman merely to give a proof, that even recognized popular talents will not always secure their possessor from annoyances, and heart-galling mortifications.

I now hasten to bring my memoirs to a close, —at least for the present; for I am looking back to the period of which I am now writing, through a vista of some years. Should the preceding pages interest the public, I may resume my pen, though I have my doubts; for I am growing old, and writing is a labour to

me. Suffice it now to say, that through the means of that same friend by whom I was introduced to the congregation at Z—, I was introduced to another, where I still am; and with which, perhaps, I may close my days. I am now labouring in rather a humble station,—in a small village; and as the greater part of my small flock are elderly people, they do not care much about novelty. Whatever farther memorials I might now, in my days of garrulity, set down on paper, would be more of reflection, and of sketches of character, than of personal history. In the above I can assure the reader, that I have not been prompted by any feeling of resentment, or of irritation; I have merely set forth the evils of a system,—and I do not see how it can be mended. Then why, it may be said, do I send forth these observations to the world? I will tell the reader why:—I send them forth in order that dissenters, seeing the evils which their system induces, may be as much as possible on their guard against them: and that they may not seek to extend, and to make general, a system which never can work well.

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